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The BUFFALO BILL

STORIES

Devoted
To

Far West
Life



BUFFALO BILL AND THE GILDED CLIQUE

OR
PAWNEE BILL'S
MOUNTAIN SLIDE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL"



The log, with Pawnee Bill aboard, got away like a lightning express down the chute, but Buffalo Bill was too busy to give much attention to the hair-raising spectacle.

STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK.

THE BUFFALO BILL



A WEEKLY PUBLICATION STORIES DEVOTED TO BORDER LIFE

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Buffalo Bill and the Gilded Clique;

OR,

PAWNEE BILL'S MOUNTAIN-SLIDE

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

THE RETURN OF PERDITA.

"Stop the horses, Carlos! Stop them!"

The swarthy little Mexican on the front seat of the buckboard pulled in the team with a startled jerk. As soon as the vehicle had come to a standstill, the woman arose from the seat behind, and peered steadily and wondertoingly in the direction of the Rio Concho.

"*Madre mia!*" the woman whispered, "what is wrong? What has happened?"

The woman was young, perhaps eighteen or twenty. Her form was slender and graceful, her hair black as night and shiny as polished jet, and her eyes wide and dark and lustrous. It was evident that, if she was not wholly Mexican, there was at least Mexican blood in her veins.

She and the driver were the only passengers in the buckboard. That the vehicle had come far was evident from the weariness of the horses at the pole.

It was on rising ground that the girl had ordered Carlos to stop. From there the Circle-T ranch buildings, backed by the cottonwoods that bordered the Concho, could be plainly seen. And there, where the girl had expected to see a great crowd, and to hear the shouts of hundreds of voices, she saw no one and heard not a sound.

A funereal quiet reigned everywhere. Between the white stems of the cottonwoods, the Concho sparkled in the afternoon sun. From its situation on rising ground, the silent "headquarters adobe" brooded over a camp

that seemed deserted. There were no horses in the corrals, no loungers around the bunk house or chuck shanty, no sign of life anywhere.

The strangeness of it all impressed even the tired Carlos. "*Por Dios!*" he muttered, slapping the dust from his coat with a wondering hand.

"Have I made a mistake?" breathed the girl. "Have I come at the wrong time? Have the games for this year been called off, or perhaps postponed?"

"*Quien sabe,*" muttered Carlos, shaking his head.

"Drive on to the camp," ordered the girl, a foreboding note in her voice, as she seated herself. "We'll find out about this, and *muy pronto.*"

Carlos slapped the horses with his whip, and the buckboard moved down the slope toward the Concho. The eyes of the Mexican and the girl were alert as they proceeded.

Presently they struck the trail that approached the headquarters adobe through the river cottonwoods. Here there was the flotsam and jetsam of a great camp—the remains of a sojourn of a large concourse of people. The trees were gnawed and broken, the ground trampled, and the white ashes of dead fires lay heaped in many places.

"People have been here," murmured the girl, "but they have gone. Why have they gone? Where is my father, and my father's men?"

Carlos, thrilled with an enigma that was rapidly becoming portentous, made no response. His eyes gleamed

strangely, as they darted from point to point, but his brain was numb and his lips mute.

At a bend in the road they came suddenly upon the first sign of life.

A German sat in the shade, smoking a long pipe phlegmatically, and leaning back against the rear wheel of a disreputable-looking wagon. The other rear wheel of the wagon was missing, while that corner of the box was supported by a trimmed sapling, bound to the wagon's side, projecting backward and under the wheelless axle. At a little distance from the German, two mules were picketed. The man looked up, as the buckboard came to a halt in front of him.

"Who are you?" demanded the girl.

The stolid calm of the German was in nowise ruffled. He blew a long whiff of smoke from his pipe, and peered curiously at the girl.

"Fritz Von Schnitzenhauser," said he deliberately.

"Where are you from?"

"From der Palo Duro."

"What are you doing here?"

"I come to see der games, yes."

"Why are there no games?"

"Pecause eferybody iss gone away."

"Why haven't you gone away?"

"Pecause oof a veel vich I don'd got for der leedle wagon. Ven I ged der veel, den I go."

"Where is Jeff Trent, the owner of the ranch?"

"Ask me dot."

"I am asking you," said the woman impatiently.

"Den guess it ould same as me. Ven you don'd know somet'ing, vat's der use making believes?"

"Drive on Carlos," ordered the girl. "You're a fool," she added to the Dutchman, "the biggest fool I ever saw."

"Present company oxcepted," remarked Fritz, calmly whiffling at his long pipe.

When the buckboard came out of the cottonwoods and climbed the "rise" to the headquarters adobe, a wiry, one-eyed half-breed came out on the veranda of the house, leaned against a porch post, and watched somberly.

"Jules Lacroix!" exclaimed the girl. "Caramba! I am glad to find my father's foreman here, anyhow. Where is my father? And where are the games?"

Jules Lacroix kept silence until the girl had alighted, and Carlos had driven the team and wagon away toward the nearest corral; then, after the girl was seated on the veranda, the half-breed placed himself before her.

"Ze games began ze ozzer day, *oui*, zen ze ver' first day we haf ze trouble. Señorita Perdita Reyes, she come now, and she find a ver' sad place at ze Circle-T."

Fire flashed in the black eyes of Perdita Reyes.

"Tell me," she breathed fiercely, "and lose no time about it. *Madre de Cristos!* Is it not my right to know, and to know quickly?"

Jules rolled a cigarette, and sank down on the top of the veranda steps.

"*Oh hé,*" he mourned, when his cigarette was comfortably going, "eet ees a sad bizness. Me, I feel ze deep sorrow for eet all, señorita. Ever' year, as ze señorita know, her fazer, ze Monsieur Jeff Trent, he haf ze broncho bust, ze horse race, ze rope throw, an' ze gun shoot, here at ze Circle-T, an' ze people come from all ovair ze country. Eet was ze same zis year as alway. We haf more people to ze games, py gar, zan we haf any ozzer year zat I know. Zen, malediction! zat Buf-

falo Beel he come, an' ze Pawnee Beel, an' zey make ze trouble!"

"Buffalo Bill? Pawnee Bill?" the girl echoed.

"*Oui!*" chattered the one-eyed foreman. "Zey bust up ze games, zey fin' out 'bout ze counterfeit money, an' zey take away ze señorita's fazer to ze jail. Whoosh, ze luck ees bad! Me, I feel lak ze whipped dog, an' I no got ze heart for anyzing."

Perdita Reyes sprang up, dazed, astounded. Then, suddenly flinging herself forward, she bent and dropped both hands on the half-breed's shoulders, shaking him fiercely.

"Is this true?" she cried, her voice shaking with passion.

"I spik ze truth alway to ze señorita," answered Jules.

"You say that Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill came here to the games; that they discovered that my father was a counterfeiter, and that they took him away to prison?"

"*Oui!*"

"How could they prove my father was a counterfeiter? Did he get careless? Did some one at the ranch tell?"

She straightened erect, pantherlike, her fair face reddening with the hot blood that ran in her veins.

"No won spik wan word, señorita! Ze two Beel zey fin' ze plates zat ze money ees printed from. Zey take away ze plates wiz Monsieur Trent, zen ze Rangers zey ordair ze games to cease, an' zey send away ze people. So zere ees no wan at ze ranch but me, Jules Lacroix. Ze ozzers are away to look for ze cattle."

The girl walked up and down the porch, talking to herself fiercely, and tossing her hands.

"Where did they take my father?" she shot suddenly at the foreman.

"To Wagon Wheel Gap, at ze first, an' zen away by ze steam train."

"My father is gone, then, and for good!"

She sank into a chair, and buried her face in her hands.

"Eet ees sad to say, señorita," murmured Jules heavily, "but ze law will haf its way wiz Monsieur Trent. By gar, I feel lak I bust to pieces."

After a few moments' grieving Perdita Reyes leaped to her feet.

"If the law has its way with my father," she hissed, "then we will have our way with Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill! They shall feel the weight of Perdita's vengeance! They shall pay, they shall pay!"

She shook her clenched fist.

"Señorita," returned the foreman, his one eye glimmering curiously, "how you mak' ze scout an' his pard pay, huh? Ze Beels zey haf ze courage of ze lion an' ze cunning of ze fox. W'at ees zere for you an' me zat we can do alone?"

"Not alone," said the girl. "There is my husband, Jorgé. He is at Montezuma camp. With Jorgé is Jack Barbazon and Emil Flint—all members of the Clique of Gold. I will send for them, Jules. They will come here, and they will help us. What can Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill do against the Gilded Clique?" Perdita flung back her shapely head, and laughed shrilly. "Madre mia," she finished, "we will teach these Bills a lesson. They shall know what it means to cross the trail of Jeff Trent! Find some one, Jules, to go to Montezuma. I will write a letter, and the messenger shall take it to Jorgé."

She ran into the house. Fifteen minutes later she had written her call to the Gilded Clique. Jules himself was

mounted on a fleet horse, and waiting for the letter, at the foot of the veranda steps.

There was a baleful look in the foreman's scarred face as he spurred away.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLOTTERS.

During the night, and early the following morning, the members of the Gilded Clique all rounded up at Jeff Trent's headquarters adobe at the Circle-T. They were not all with Jorgé Reyes at Montezuma, so they could not all reach the ranch with Señor Reyes and the one-eyed foreman. Señor Reyes sent out word to the other two members of the blackleg syndicate, however, and Jack Barbazon got to the Rio Concho at midnight, while Emil Flint arrived there in time for breakfast. Barbazon had been in the town of Wagon Wheel Gap, and Flint had been tolerably busy in a lumberman's camp on Whipsaw Mountain.

Perdita and her husband, Jack Barbazon, and Emil Flint, had pooled issues in monte and faro. Each of the men was a past master in the legerdemain that makes these gambling games successful, and in all the South-western country there was no more skilled dealer than Perdita.

Behind the silver box, the girl was a siren. Her beauty was a very tangible asset for the unscrupulous association, and when she unmasked the battery of her liquid eyes there were few bystanders who could resist laying their money on the game over which she presided.

So notorious had become the Clique for its sleight of hand and its winnings, that the appearance of any one of its members in a fairly respectable camp was a signal for the marshal thereof to conduct said member to the edge of the open country, and give him five minutes to make himself absent.

Because of this unsavory reputation, it was the habit of the members of the Clique to wander from one settlement to another, in disguise. Thus they continued to fool the town marshals, and to pile up their unscrupulous gains.

Down among the cottonwoods, while the gathering of the sharks was in progress, Fritz Von Schnitzenhauser continued to smoke, and to wonder where he was to pick up a spare wheel for his wagon.

He had seen the one-eyed foreman depart from the ranch at speed. This speed in itself foreboded important things going forward at the headquarters adobe; but the most important thing in Fritz Von Schnitzenhauser's mind was where he could secure a spare wheel for his wagon, and he paid little attention to Jules and his flight.

In the early evening hours Jules, the foreman, rode along the trail through the cottonwoods with a comrade. Fritz was awake, and saw the dusky figures of the two horsemen, recognizing Jules by his shrill voice and his broken jargon.

Later, Fritz was aroused by another rider galloping into camp; and then, in the morning, while Fritz was consuming the last morsel of food in his ration bag, he observed another horseman proceeding toward the headquarters adobe.

Fritz cared very little how many horsemen foregathered at the Circle-T; but he had had a dream during

the night, that had given him an idea, and too many men at the ranch might interfere with the practical working out of the idea.

Fritz, during his sleep, had seemed to be calmly taking a wheel off the buckboard that had brought the girl to the ranch on the preceding afternoon; and then, deliberately he had rolled the wheel down among the cottonwoods, slipped the wheel on his own axle, and triumphantly driven away.

Now, Fritz was an honest Dutchman. Not for a good deal would he have set his hand to do anything that crossed his conscience. But the odd thing about it was, that there didn't seem to be anything wrong in stealing the wheel of the buckboard.

At a cost of much effort to himself, Fritz had come to the Circle-T Ranch to see the games. He had been cheated out of the games, and it seemed only right to him that he should make the most of the ranch resources to help him back to the place where he belonged.

Besides, Fritz argued to himself, dreams don't just happen along. They're sent as monitors, and monitors ought to know what is best for us. So Fritz thanked his lucky stars for this particular monitor, and, immediately after he had finished his rations, he stole warily up the "rise" in the direction of the headquarters adobe. There was a wrench in his pocket, and determination in his heart.

The buckboard was close to a corral in the rear of the adobe house. Before he got to work on the buckboard, Fritz felt that it would be advisable to learn something as to the whereabouts of the one-eyed foreman and the people in the adobe.

Jules was nowhere in sight. Fritz crept along the side of the house, and came under the edge of the veranda just as some one issued through the front door.

"If we're goin' to talk," said a voice, "let's do our palaverin' on the porch. There ain't a soul within several miles of us, and I reckon we can wrestle this to a fall without any outside party bein' the wiser.

"Buenos, Emil," returned another voice. "Come on Jack, you and Perdita."

The door banged two or three times, and there was a tread of feet on the veranda, and a sliding and scraping of chairs. Fritz, in momentary panic, had rolled under the veranda.

"Now," came the thin voice of the foreman, over Fritz's head, "we can make ze talk so mooth as we lak."

"What have you got to say, Jack?" queried the voice of the man called Emil.

"I got an idea that's a bird," answered the man named Jack. "I've been in Wagon Wheel Gap, and the trouble Jeff Trent got into wasn't no news to me. I was there when he was brought in and turned over to the Rangers, and I was there when this detective person and the Rangers took him out of camp. While I was there, too, I cleaned up on a tenderfoot, and had just salted away the last of the tenderfoot's dinero, when word come to me from Jorgé; now—"

"What's the plan?" interrupted Emil impatiently.

"I'm gettin' to it, Emil," was the reply. "Buffalo Bill, I happen to know, is still in Wagon Wheel Gap. His pard, Pawnee Bill, Jorgé tells us, is in Montezuma, while this pard of the scout's—called the baron, accordin' to you, Emil—is in this lumber camp on Whipsaw. Why the scout and his pards are scattered like that, we don't know, but it's a good thing for us, seein' as how we can

take 'em in detachments, one at a time. And you'll excuse me for sayin', that's the only way fellers like us ought to go against an outfit like that of the king of scouts."

"*Caramba!*" came from the girl in a tone of scorn. "Why should the Clique be afraid of Buffalo Bill and his pards, either separately or all together?"

"*Tut, querida!*" came the voice of Jorgé. "This scout has little love for men of the cards who are not on the square. There was once another Gilded Clique which, I hear, crossed his trail and got the worst of it. This Clique of ours, *novia*, must stand until we each heap up much *dinero* and can—retire. Eh, amigos? Is it not so?"

"It's so," declared Emil. "We've got to be careful. If we're not, we may find ourselves cold-decked; and I, for one, am not pining to have the Cody brand of kibosh handed out to me. Jack's head's level. We'll take Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, and the Dutchman, one at a time. In that way only can we hope to get even for what has happened to Jeff Trent, our unfortunate amigo, and the father-in-law of Jorgé. Tell us what else you've got on your mind, Jack."

"I'm a bit hazy from that point on, Emil," proceeded Barbazon, "but I reckoned that Perdita, properly disguised, or not, as she thinks best, might go to Buffalo Bill with a tale of woe of some sort. He's a knight of the plains, he is, and they do say he'll travel fast and far to aid any woman who is in distress. Now, so far as I know, Buffalo Bill never saw Perdita. That's a point in Perdita's favor, when she comes to work the plan. Then, again, Perdita's good looks, and her ability to play a part, will all tell in the game."

"What sort of game is to result, Barbazon?" demanded Perdita.

"It's a trail of vengeance, eh?" Barbazon asked.

"I will have pay for what has happened to *mi padre*."

"Exactly. It's vengeance you're after, and I am not averse to helping, because I understand that the tenderfoot, from whom I levied tribute in Wagon Wheel Gap, went at once to Buffalo Bill and asked him to help in recovering the money. I don't know what Buffalo Bill decided to do, amigos, but, personally, I'd rather deal violently with the scout before he has the chance—er—to deal violently with me. You rise to that, eh?"

Everybody, apparently, arose to Barbazon's remarks.

"By the fiends," muttered Emil Flint, "if Buffalo Bill gets after you, Jack, he'll be getting after the lot of us. As you say, the thing for us is to head him off before he gets started. Go on."

"Well, then, suppose Perdita acts a part, and lures the scout into some place where the rest of us will be laying for him? Jules, here, knows a pretty trick with the knife, and—but, being a man who picks his words with consideration, I hesitate to describe what will happen to the scout when he does fall into our hands."

"*Dios mio,*" muttered Jorgé, "that's a point we must cover well. Whatever happens to the scout, the Clique must not be suspected. The scout has other pards; Pawnee Bill is still at Montezuma, remember; and the baron still on Whipsaw. Somewhere near Red River, I am told, compadres, that the Indian boy and the hombre called old Nomad, are waiting for their three amigos. There will be plenty left to settle with the Clique—with the scout out of the way, and the Clique suspected."

"When we finish with Buffalo Bill, amigos," went on Barbazon, "then we will give attention to Pawnee Bill

and to the baron, one at a time, and Perdita working in the way that seems best to her."

"Trust me, trust me," breathed Perdita. "I remember my father, and it will steel my heart and make me keen and clever. I will do well my part."

Fritz, under the veranda, thought that he had heard enough. He was quivering with excitement. The thing for him to do was to get away from the Circle-T Ranch, and to do it quickly.

As quietly as possible he crawled, inch by inch, out from under the veranda. He listened intently for sounds from overhead, indicating that his movements were heard. No such sounds came to him. He drew his first long breath when he had gained the side of the house, risen erect, and started warily toward the corral.

CHAPTER III.

FRITZ FORMS A RESOLVE.

It was not the cool villainy of the plans Fritz had overheard which had made the deepest impression on him. The thing that gave that villainy a personal bias was this: Fritz was a Von Schnitzenhauser, and the baron, Buffalo Bill's Dutch pard, was also a Von Schnitzenhauser. Furthermore, Fritz knew the baron. Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill were nothing to Fritz, but—*Gott sei dank!*—the time was not yet when the good, old Von Schnitzenhausers would not hang together. So what Fritz had overheard about the baron caused him fear and worry.

The baron, it seemed, was in the lumber camp on Whipsaw Mountain. While these scoundrels were carrying out their black designs against the king of scouts, Fritz would endeavor to reach Whipsaw Mountain and put a flea in the baron's ear.

However, to attempt to reach Whipsaw Mountain with a crippled wagon was asking entirely too much of fate. Now that Fritz was in the game, he argued that he might as well go the limit and help himself to the wheel of the buckboard.

Out by the corral the coast was still clear. The cowboys belonging with the Circle-T outfit were all busy at a distance from headquarters, and the plotters on the veranda were looking the wrong way to see what was going on by the corral.

Luck was with the Dutchman. The wrench he had brought fitted the nut that held the buckboard's rear wheel, and he soon had the nut in his pocket and the wheel off the axle. As he rolled the wheel past the corral gate, luck slipped a cog. A yell broke on Fritz's ears, and a Mexican leaped up from behind a cluttered heap of saddles, bridles, and harness, and struck a bee line for the adobe.

Fritz, for a moment, was thunderstruck. Here was the Mexican driver of the buckboard—a rascal Fritz had forgotten all about.

One thing was sure: If that Mexican was allowed to reach the headquarters adobe, and tell what he knew, Fritz himself would probably be the first victim of the Clique.

The Mexican was running like a deer. He had not yet reached the slope of the "rise," but he would soon be on the incline, and with no obstacle to interrupt his race to the top.

For Fritz, ponderous and slow as he was, to overhaul

that lithe-limbed Mexican was out of the question. To send a shot after him—which would not have been advisable, anyhow, on account of the noise—was equally impossible, for Fritz had left his revolver in his wagon.

There was only one course for Fritz to pursue. Bending his back to the buckboard wheel, he gave it a mighty shove. The wheel darted across the space separating Fritz from the Mexican. By great good fortune, the wheel struck the Mexican, knocked him down, rolled over him, and wabbled to earth a dozen feet beyond. Before the dazed Carlos could regain his feet, Fritz was upon him.

"A bird in der handt gadders no moss," remarked Fritz, sitting on Carlos' chest and half strangling him, "und a rolling shtone is vort' two in der bush. For vich reason I ged you off my hands so kevick as possible und roll away in der vagon mit der mools und der porrowed veel. How you like dot, eh?"

Carlos was getting blue in the face. His eyes were bulging from his head, his breath came in wheezy gasps, and every limb was weak and helpless.

"I guess dot vill do," muttered Fritz. "Don'd make some more noises oder I vill hurt you vorse as dot. Come, now!"

He drew his hands from the Mexican's throat, got to his feet, seized the Mexican by the shoulders, and dragged him back to the pile of horse furniture. There, from among the riding gear, he selected a riata, and with that he proceeded to secure his captive. After the tying, a handkerchief was twisted into a rope for a gag, and bound between the captive's jaws. Lastly, Fritz heaved several saddles over the man and left him.

Had the Mexican's yell been heard by those on the veranda? Apparently not, for, if it had been heard, there would surely have been interruptions for Fritz in his work with Carlos.

A study of the adobe offered nothing in the way of alarm for Fritz. He started toward the buckboard wheel, then paused and returned to the gate of the corral. All the horses at headquarters were in that corral. Following a few moments' reflection, Fritz opened the corral gate and allowed the riding horses and the buckboard team to run out.

"Oof dose peoble vant to shace afder me," chuckled Fritz, "dey vill haf to come on deir feet, oder vaste time geddung deir horses pack, py dunder. A stitch in time iss sufficient, und a vort' to der vise safes nine."

He went after the wheel, set it upright, and began rolling it toward the river. He was very careful to make for the cover of the cottonwoods at a place from which those on the veranda of the adobe would not be able to see him.

In this he was successful; but, while he was trundling the wheel along the trail in the direction of his wagon, he looked out from between the cottonwoods and saw Jules, the half-breed foreman, descending the slope toward the corral.

The foreman would discover that the horses were gone. That would arouse his suspicions. After a time—how long or short a time Fritz could not guess—the foreman would also discover Carlos. The story Carlos would tell would be worth the price of Fritz's scalp, unless Fritz could remove the scalp to a safe distance.

The Dutchman began to make haste. The hub of the new wheel went over the axle, and the new bolt went on, just as though they had been made for Fritz's wagon.

But the wheel was six inches larger than the wagon's other rear wheel, which gave the crazy vehicle a corner-wise cant which did not at all add to its beauty.

"Haluf a loaf is pedder as a kick, anyways," mused Fritz, flying away to his mules, harness in his hands. "Voa, Bismarck, you olt shtick in der mud," wheedled Fritz, throwing on the harness. "Ve got to ged out oof here in a hurry, so be goot now und don'd make some drouples."

Having got the harness on Bismarck, Fritz ran to the edge of the cottonwoods, called there by various yells from the corral. What he saw still further aroused his alarm. Jules had found Carlos, and removed the rope and the gag, and Carlos and Jules were yelling to attract the attention of the men at the adobe. Fritz turned, in a flutter of apprehension, picked up the other set of harness, and rushed at the remaining mule.

"Be goot mit yourslef, Von Moltke," wheedled Fritz, puffing as he worked. "Ve got to run like anyding, I bed you. *Donnervetter*, my fingers iss all t'umbs."

In his haste Fritz lost more time than if he had proceeded more slowly, but at last Von Moltke was in his harness, and the Dutchman was hitching both mules to the pole.

Voces could be heard in the distance, growing rapidly louder.

"Dose fellers vas afder me," he muttered. "Dey vas coming dis vay so fast as dey can run. Well, der race iss not to der shtrong, nor der pattle to der swift, und I bed you I gif dem a run for deir auburn chip. T'ings has come to a pooty fine pass ven der Von Schnitzenhausers don'd hang togedder. I vill safe der paron oder know der reason vy nod."

As Fritz grabbed the lines, and scrambled to his seat in the buckboard, Jules, Carlos, and two more men appeared in the trail. Three of the men had revolvers in their hands.

"Ged ap mit yourslef!" cried Fritz to the mules, bringing the gad down on Bismarck with stinging force.

The mules jumped, and the wagon groaned under the strain; then, with a rattle and bang, the lop-sided vehicle shot into the trail and turned along it, scraping against a tree, and avoiding destruction by a narrow margin.

"Stop!" yelled one of the men behind.

"I peen in a hurry, und I can't shtop!" answered Fritz.

"Stop or we'll shoot!"

"Shoot as you like, py dunder!" roared Fritz. "I vas a Von Schnitzenhauser, und bowder and pullets iss tinner for me."

The firing began before the words were fairly out of Fritz's mouth. Lead splashed against the wagon, missed Fritz by a hair's breadth, and touched up the mules. The two animals laid themselves out, and the way that tip-tilted, ramshackle old wagon got over the ground was a caution. The vehicle was little more than a scrap heap held together by rusty bolts, not one of which was at all dependable. But luck held with Fritz this time.

Presently he was out of range of the flying bullets, and a little later he was on the top of the hill from which Perdita Reyes had taken her dismal view of the deserted camp. He drew the mules to a halt, and while they wheezed and panted, he got to his feet and looked back.

In the middle distance stood the four men who had been pursuing Fritz. They were at a standstill, and when

they saw him stop, stand up, and look around, they began to wave their hats and arms.

"For vy do dey act like dot?" mused Fritz. "Vone oof dem iss yaving a vite handkerchief und valking oop der hill. It iss a flag oof druce, yes, und der feller vants to talk. Vell, meppy I led him, aber you bed you I vill do some shooding meinself oof he makes drouple mit me."

Fritz reached down and picked up his revolver. Still standing, he rested the weapon across the back of the seat.

"Vat it iss you vant?" he shouted. "Don'd come too close oder I plaze avay."

"Don't shoot," answered the man with the flag of truce, "I want to talk with you."

"Den talk from vere you vas. To come closer as dot iss tangerous."

The man halted.

"Did you turn our horses loose?" the man asked.

"Yah."

"And you stole the wheel off the buckboard?"

"I don'd shtearl nodding. I took der veel."

"Then—"

But just then, out of the tails of his eyes, Fritz saw a movement of some one at the house. This movement, as Fritz interpreted it, was designed to place the girl and another man at a point in the trail ahead of the wagon while the man below was causing a deadlock by his talk.

With a defiant yell, Fritz dropped into his seat, and once more used the gad.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER TURN OF THE WHEEL.

When Fritz Von Schnitzenhauser had placed six miles between himself and the Circle-T Ranch, he dropped his lines to grasp his left hand with his right, and shake it in a congratulatory way.

"He laughs pest who iss oudt oof der woods," remarked the Dutchman to himself, "und don'd vistle ondil you can laugh lasdt. I peen a poaty schmardt feller, I bed you, und I vill safe der paron oder know der reason vy nod. Ged ap, dere, you Bismarck mool; voa, haw, mit yourself, Von Moltke!"

Fritz, while exulting over his recent escapade, and congratulating himself, was oblivious of the disasters that threatened him. His crazy old wagon had never had such a shaking up before, and the wrenching had come at an advanced stage in the vehicle's career, when it was least able to weather the storm.

Like the "one-hoss shay," of song and story, Fritz Von Schnitzenhauser's wagon had weakened to the breaking point in every part. By the grace of luck and a blunder of chance, it had held together through what seemed the time of his greatest need, but now it was only awaiting the psychological moment for falling into a scrap pile. Fritz, sitting on top of this gathering calamity, continued blindly to exult and lay his plans for a rapid journey to Whipsaw Mountain.

Those of my readers who have already made the acquaintance of Fritz's mules, Bismarck and Von Moltke, will recall their distressing habit of suddenly leaping from a walk into an incipient run at totally unexpected moments.

The trail, at the place where Fritz now found himself, made its way along the rim of Bowie Gulch. Fritz was allowing the mules to proceed at a leisurely walk, by way of resting them up after the hard race they had made, when, without the least warning, both animals flung themselves forward into a headlong run.

Then, for Fritz, the unexpected happened. His ancient wagon, with a final screech and a husky death rattle, dropped into its constituent parts. It was just the complete giving way of a senile old rattletrap, and Fritz found himself on the ground in the midst of the wreck, as astounded a Dutchman as could have been found in that part of the country.

The seat on which Fritz had been sitting was in pieces; his head was through the dashboard; the tires had rolled from the three original wheels, and the spokes had caved inward from outward; the box had disintegrated into splinters and broken boards, and the iron stays had dropped from their bolts.

Fritz was so astounded that he was stunned. For several moments he could not realize what had happened. The mules were as much surprised as was Fritz—but they were not dazed. The wrecking of the wagon had frightened them into a run, and they raced off down the trail, with only the neck yoke holding them together.

By and by, when realization had broken over Fritz, he stood up in the midst of the wreck and looked around him with a sinking heart.

"Vat a luck!" he wailed, tossing his arms, "vat a luck it iss ven I peen in sooch a hurry to get by Vipsaw Mountain. Und I don'd vas aple to fix oop der leedle wagon no more. Sooch a fine wagon vat it vas, und now it iss all pusted in bieces."

Fritz felt inclined to blubber over the fate of the wagon. The only part of it that had remained perfect and intact was the wheel borrowed from the buckboard at the Circle-T. That wheel, round and symmetrical, and firmly belted with its tire, lay off to one side, and mocked Fritz with its very perfection.

He made his way out of the wreck, and kicked the wheel savagely, incidentally bruising his foot and his shin.

"Don'd you make some faces at me!" he scowled. "You pelong to a wagon vat pelongs mit a lot oof ropers, und dis odler wagon vat iss a wreck is a honest wagon, you bet."

While Fritz was slowly circling the scrap pile, and trying to make up his mind as to what course of action he should now pursue, he heard hoofs patting the trail to the north. Facing in that direction, his heart leaped joyfully at sight of two cowboys, speeding toward him, and leading his mules. Only the bridles were left on the mules, and the cowboys were towing the animals by the bridle reins.

"What's the matter hyer?" demanded one of the cowboys, as both drew to a halt in front of the Dutchman.

"My wagon iss pusted," said Fritz.

"Oh, no," haw-hawed the other cowboy, "I reckon she ain't busted, Dutchy! Seems ter me like she's jest nachly gone inter junk."

"Haf you a wagon some blace vat I could porrow for a vile, huh?" asked Fritz earnestly. "I peen in der piggest hurry vat you know."

"We ain't got er wagon, Dutch," said the first cowboy, "but tell us what's yer hurry? We mout be able ter help ye in some other way than furnishin' a wagon."

"Oof you can do dot, I vill be oplicated. You see, I vas ofer py der Circle-T Ranch, und I hear some fellers und a girl, py dot blace, blanning sooch high-handed pit-zness as you nefer heard. I got to make some dracks py Vipsaw Moundain so dot I safe anodder Dutchman dere vat iss a Von Schnitzenhauser, der same as me. You vill helup me, yas, no?"

One of the cowboys had got behind Fritz. As he finished speaking, a hempen noose dropped over his head and shoulders. There was a whoop, and Fritz was jerked backward at full length in the dusty trail.

Once more he was surprised. Before he could recover, both cowboys were upon him, lashing his hands and feet. When he was finally roped and helpless, the cowboys stood over him, jeering.

"Ye hevn't got enough sense ter wad a gun!" declared one.

"If ye had," put in the other, "ye'd hev reckernized us as riders belongin' ter the Circle-T outfit. Ye're a thievin', no-good Dutchman, ye are, an' we got ter the headquarters adobe while ye was pounding away from the top o' the hill. We rode quicker'n what you did, slashed up the gulch, climbed the rim at a place between you an' whar ye was goin', ketched yore mules an' raced back hyer. Stole a wheel off'n Perdita's buckboard, didn't ye? Did some eavesdroppin' at the adobe, too; an' then put Carlos down an' out, opened the c'r'al gate so'st the hosses could git away, an' did a hull lot o' things ye hadn't ort ter hev done. Oh, well, I reckon this is whar the wheel takes another turn, an' you lose."

Cold chills crept along Fritz's spine. Now, as he gazed into the two leering faces over him, he recognized the cowboys as men he had seen during the preceding day at the Circle-T Ranch. Their faces had not seemed familiar, at first, but now they were very much so.

"Take der ropes off me!" he begged.

"Not so ye kin notice," guffawed one of the captors.

"Vat vill you do mit me, hey?"

The cowboys reasoned together. When they finally made up their minds as to what they should do, they set Bismarck and Von Moltke adrift, picked Fritz up and carried him off among some boulders that edged the trail, and then gagged him with a twisted handkerchief.

"We're goin' ter leave ye hyer fer a spell, Dutch," explained one, "while we tote that thar stolen wheel back ter the Concho an' tell Perdita what's happened. Then we'll let her do what she wants to with ye. We'd take ye with us now, only we're in some sort of a hurry an' don't want ter bother with ye or yer mules. But ye'll be nice an' quiet hyer, an' ye kin look fer somebody ter come along, in the course of an hour er two, an' do what seems best with ye. *Adios!*"

Thereupon the cowboys whirled on their spurred heels, and vanished in the direction of the trail. Fritz was in a state of mind that can best be described as miserable.

He had been beaten out at his own game. Who was now to warn the baron? The Clique could go ahead and work its will, involving the baron and his friends in comprehensive disaster.

Thinking thus, the captive groaned in the bitterness of his spirit, and wrenched impotently at the cords that bound his hands. Failing to make any impression on the cords, he gnawed frantically at the twisted handkerchief. If he could not use his hands, the next best thing was to be able to use his voice. But the gag was as tough as the rope about his wrists.

Finally he gave up. Luck, he thought savagely, had never treated a man so scandalously. For a minute fortune would smile on him and everything would go swimmingly; then fortune would frown, and everything would go wrong.

"Sooch a tough luck it iss," he thought, "dot I nefer know vat minid iss going to be der nexdt. Now I am down und oundt, und vat iss to pecome oof me I can't tell, aber I haf my doubts. Dis iss a pad tay for der Von Schnitzenhausers, I bed you."

How long Fritz lay on the hard stones he did not know. At a rough estimate he placed the time at two weeks, although the shadows of a near-by boulder, moving slowly across him, assured him that it could not have been more than two hours. Then, very suddenly and unexpectedly, he heard a yell from the trail:

"Hello!"

Hope, which was all but dead in the Dutchman's breast, leaped into life. There was some one in the trail! Some one had seen the wreck of the wagon, and was trying to get track of the man who had been in it!

With all his might, Fritz attempted to shout an answer. The shout was only a gurgle, and could not have been heard half a dozen feet away.

"Hello, I say!" went on the voice.

Again Fritz tried in vain to respond. To his great joy, however, he heard hoofbeats drawing nearer and near the rocks. Now the sound receded a little, and now it was taken up and came closer. Then abruptly a man on a big buckskin horse appeared between two of the boulders, drew rein, and peered at Fritz in astonishment. The man whistled.

"Call me a greaser," said he, "if it isn't Fritz Von Schnitzenhauser, trussed up as neat as you please, and with a cute little gag between his teeth. So-ho, Fritz! Just a minute, now, and I'll have you so we can pow-wow."

Pawnee Bill dismounted from his horse, and moved swiftly to the Dutchman's side. Fritz, recognizing the scout's pard on the instant, thanked his lucky stars for a happy chance that was about as remote as any he had dreamed could come his way.

CHAPTER V.

PAWNEE BILL GETS BUSY.

Getting Fritz out of his gag and the ropes was only a minute's work for the prince of the bowie.

"How you know dere was drouple, hey?" inquired Fritz, as he sat up on the ground and leaned his back against a boulder.

"On-she-ma-da!" laughed Pawnee Bill. "Why, Fritz, I recognized that stuff in the trail as a scrambled wagon, and it wasn't hard to figure out that the wagon belonged to you. On top of that, I saw the mules; and it wasn't necessary to tag Bismarck and Von Moltke to make me remember that I had met them before."

"Um," murmured Fritz, rubbing a few bruises which, up to that moment, had been sadly neglected. "Vere you come from, eh?"

"From Montezuma."

"Und vere you go?"

"To Wagon Wheel, to join Pard Bill. He's there."

"Mebby."

"No maybe about it, Fritz. Buffalo Bill was to remain there while I took a little ride over Montezuma way."

"Don'd bank on vat you t'ink you know, Pawnee Bill. A vort to der vise iss pedder as two pirds in der bush."

The prince of the bowie stared hard at Fritz.

"What have you go at the back of your head?" he demanded. "Heave it at me, Fritz."

"Vell, I peen by der Circle-T."

"You got there too late for the games, eh?"

"You und Buffalo Bill shpoiled der games, und dey don'd go on afder you take Jeff Trent avay. I peen fooled vorse as anypody. I shday on der Concho a couple oof tays mit der veel gone from der leedle wagon, und I figger how I ged some odder veel."

"Leave the wagon out, Fritz. That's not the thing you're wanting to tell me."

"Oof it wasn't for der veel vich I ditn't haf, Pawnee Bill, dere vouldn't be nodding to tell you. Vere iss der paron?"

"In Wagon Wheel Gap, with my scout pard."

"Guess some more aboudt dot."

"At least," hedged the prince of the bowie, "the baron was with Pard Bill when I got out of Wagon Wheel. Both of them may have gone somewhere else, but I don't think it at all likely."

"I hear dot der paron iss in a camp on Vipsaw Moundain, dot you vas in Mondezuma, und dot der sgout vas in Vagon Veel Gap. Dot's how I ged it."

"Well, I'm here on the road to Wagon Wheel, and that's where you were fooled. But go on, Fritz."

"Look a leedle ould for some fellers coming pack afder me," begged Fritz, with sudden alarm. "Don'd let me ged took avay from here by dese fellers vat put der ropes on me."

Pawnee Bill climbed back into his saddle, and lifted himself in his stirrups. He was able to look over the tops of the surrounding boulders, and to scan the trail in both directions.

"There's no one in sight," said he, "either coming or going."

"Den keep vatch vile I talk," adjured Fritz.

With that he began his recital in the place where it naturally started, viz.: down among the cottonwoods of the Rio Concho; and he began it with the arrival at the Circle-T of Perdita Reyes in the buckboard.

Mention of the girl brought an exclamation to the lips of Pawnee Bill.

"I heard about Jeff Trent's daughter for the first time while I was in Montezuma," he remarked. "Her husband is a wiry little greaser—a three-card man, who is said to be *muy malo*. Jorgé Reyes left town suddenly, shortly before I made up my mind to ride to Wagon Wheel. Proceed, Fritz."

"Dot Jorgé feller come to der Circle-T," explained the Dutchman.

"What was he doing there?"

"He met some more fellers at der ranch—vone from Vipsaw Moundain, und vone from Vagon Veel Gap. Dose dinhorns, mit der girl, iss der Gilded Clique, votefor dot iss."

"Another 'Gilded Clique,' eh? That's an ominous name, and is generally borne by a gang of short-card men who are not averse to a little trouble."

Fritz continued with his story, setting forth in detail

his design on the buckboard wheel, and his manœuvres at the headquarters adobe while the Clique were in star-chamber session on the veranda.

The Dutchman's memory was fairly good, and none of the important details of the Clique's plans was neglected. Pawnee Bill listened with rapt earnestness, his interest growing as the recital progressed.

Fritz had to talk slowly. His brain was slow, and he had to proceed with care in order to avoid leaving out anything of importance.

Pawnee Bill prodded him with timely questions, and, in due course, the plot of the Clique was laid bare.

"Shades of Unk-te-hee;" exclaimed the prince of the bowie. "That Perdita girl is a tiger cat, and she and the other members of the Clique lay their murderous plans like so many Apaches. They're cold-game persons, and very eager to wipe out my necarnis and his pards, one at a time, just to saw off even for what happened to Jeff Trent! Well, we'll see!"

Pawnee Bill pulled off his hat, and fished a cigar from the crown. As he lighted the weed, he lifted himself in his stirrups to survey the trail.

"You don't know, of course, whether any one passed here on the way from the Concho to Wagon Wheel Gap while you were on your back with the gag in your mouth."

"I don'd hear nopoly go by," answered Fritz.

"Chances are, amigo, that the girl wouldn't go by on her way to Wagon Wheel without at least having a look-in on you. We can figure that point as safe. We can bank, then, on the fact that Perdita Reyes hasn't made the first move in the plot of the Clique."

"Der fairst moof vas to be against der sgout."

"So I gathered from what you said, Fritz. You were going to Wagon Wheel Gap to tell Pard Bill that—"

"I was going so fast as bossiple to Vipsaw Moundain to put some fleas in der paron's ear."

"But Wagon Wheel and Pard Bill was your first best bet, Fritz."

"I don'd know dot," answered Fritz stolidly. "Der paron iss a Von Schnitzenhauser, der same as me. So I go fairst by Vipsaw Moundain."

"Still, the first move of the Clique was to have been leveled at the king of scouts."

"Vell, anyvay, I go to der paron."

"You're Dutch," laughed Pawnee Bill, "and a Dutchman always gets the cart before the horse, *nicht wahr?* Well, the Clique have designed a game which they believe to be cruel, crafty, and safe—all of which it might have been had luck not brought me to the wreck of your wagon, and in here among the rocks."

"Yah, so," agreed Fritz. "Forevarned iss pedder as to lif in some glass houses."

"You mean," corrected Pawnee Bill, "that forewarned is forearmed."

"I mean vat I mean. Forevarned iss pedder as drowning some shdones."

"You're mixed on the old saws, Fritz, but we'll let it go at that. I hope that you're not mixed on the plot these monte men have aimed at the scout and his pards. As I say, we've got to get busy, and teach this blackleg outfit that Cody and his *compañeros* know a trick worth two of theirs. To that end, Fritz, we'll ride to Wagon Wheel. Your mules are out there in the trail, and you can back one of them."

"I don'd go by Vagon Veel," declared Fritz firmly, "aber by Vipsaw Moundain."

"An-pe-tu-we;" exclaimed Pawnee Bill. "Can't you understand, Fritz, that if we balk the Wagon Wheel end of the plot, it settles that other end over on Whipsaw Mountain?"

"I helup vone oof der Von Schnitzenhausers, und I go by Vipsaw Moundain so kevick as possible."

"Have it your way, then, but take my advice, and start somewhere before any of the Circle-T punchers have a chance to move this way and lay hands on you. The ki-yis won't run in any rhinacabooos on my *compadres* if I'm able to call the turn, and I'm willing to bet the limit that I can. First off, though, I'll help you get started."

Pawnee Bill spurred out toward the trail, gathered in the loitering mules, helped Fritz mount Bismarck, and then placed in his hand the reins of Von Moltke's bridle.

"Think you can shift for yourself now, Fritz?" asked the prince of the bowie.

"I don'd vas afraidt oof nodding," declared Fritz. "I vill ride so fast as I can, und oof dose Circle-T fellers ketch oop mit me, dey vas welcome."

"Then, *adios!* You're a good Dutchman, Fritz, but a number eight hat is too big for you."

Fritz could not understand this last remark, and his Teutonic dignity would not allow him to request an explanation. With a wave of the hand, Pawnee Bill rattled his spurs, and Chick-Chick raced for the sky line.

Two hours later the big buckskin slowed to a halt in front of the Palmer House in Wagon Wheel Gap. Zeke Palmer, the proprietor, was sitting out in front, smoking and gossiping with a couple of loungers.

"Buffalo Bill here?" inquired Pawnee Bill, slipping down from the saddle.

"Wall, Pawnee," answered Palmer, "he was, but he ain't hyer now."

The prince of the bowie straightened suddenly, and whirled around.

"Where is he?" he demanded sharply.

"A young woman come breezin' erlong an hour ago, an' had a private palaver with the scout. Arter which the scout saddled up an' shacked away with said moharrue. What's ter pay, Pawnee?"

Just at that particular moment the prince of the bowie would have given his spurs to know exactly what was to pay.

CHAPTER VI.

A QUEER CROSS-PLAY.

Buffalo Bill and his pards wrote history rapidly when they set their hands to it. The downfall of Jeff Trent, of the Circle-T Ranch, quite an exciting affair while it lasted, had been accomplished and the event wiped off the slate for all time.

The scout and the prince of the bowie, on their way to Red River to join old Nomad, Little Cayuse, and the baron, had turned aside to visit the Rio Concho and see the games which Jeff Trent was about to hold at his ranch.

These games recurred yearly, and were the means by which the artful Trent exploited the sport-loving settlers for miles around. Trent had a neat little establishment for manufacturing counterfeit twenty-dollar notes, and his principal activities during the games centred in vari-

ous methods for "shoving the queer" and exchanging his bogus paper money for gold and silver.

It fell to the king of scouts, the prince of the bowie, and the baron to help in apprehending Trent, and in sending him out of the country.*

Immediately after the affair of Trent had been thus satisfactorily brought to a close, the scout, the prince of the bowie, and the baron would have fared onward toward Red River and their waiting pards, had not Captain Coleman, of the Rangers, requested them to remain in that part of the country for a while longer.

Coleman, when he proffered the request, did not state his reasons for making it. He merely gave the scout to understand that the interests of law and order might profit materially if the scout and his pards would delay their journey northward. Knowing that Coleman was not a man of idle words, Buffalo Bill had agreed to remain for a few days in Wagon Wheel Gap.

Pawnee Bill, hearing of an old acquaintance who was in Montezuma, had made a trip to the latter camp to renew the ties of friendship first forged in the Cherokee Strip. He had not left Wagon Wheel Gap many hours behind him before the baron, tiring of inaction, saddled his mule, Toofer, and rode on a pilgrimage to the camp on Whipsaw Mountain.

There was no particular reason why the baron should go to Whipsaw Mountain, apart from the fact that lively times were reported in the camp there, and that "lively times" were always a magnet for the scout's Dutch pard.

About this time it was that a callow youth from the East called on the scout, and stated that he had been robbed of all his cash in a gambling game.

The youth's name was Horace Parmenter. The scout, after a little investigation, found that Horace still had a small amount of money left; so he told the youth that he had other and more important matters to deal with, read him a lecture on the folly of gambling, and bade him go his way and profit by the experience.

Parmenter returned to the Palmer House early in the afternoon of the day that had witnessed Fritz Von Schnitzenhauser's flight from the Circle-T Ranch; and, somewhat to the scout's amazement, Captain Coleman accompanied the youth. When they had hunted a private place for a talk, Coleman uncovered certain details which still further surprised the scout.

"Buffalo Bill," said the captain of the Rangers, "what I wanted ye an' yer pards ter hang out longer in this part o' the range fer, was ter help me corral an outfit o' gamblers who've been makin' a nuisance o' themselves. These gamblers don't pay any attention whatever to the laws of the state, but work their crooked games right an' left. They've been known ter shoot up a man who found 'em workin' a table holdout, an' ter put a dirk in another man who found they was playin' with 'readers.'

"Now, that kind o' work don't go down with the law-abidin' people o' this state, not fer a minit, an' I was told, three months ago, ter round up this bunch o' tin-horns an' land 'em in the nearest jail ter be dealt with accordin' ter law. The man they shot has died jest recent in a hospital at San Antoine. That, ye see, gives us a clean charge o' homicide ag'in the outfit."

"Why don't you go after them, Coleman?" queried the

*See No. 486 of the BUFFALO BILL AND PAWNEE BILL STORIES, "Buffalo Bill's Blockade; or, Pawnee Bill and the Tenderfoot."

scout. "It ought to be easy to locate a lot of tinhorns of that stripe."

"Not so easy as you think, Buffalo Bill. Thar's four in the gang, an' they've split up and took ter wearin' disguises. I reckoned you might be interested in helpin' me run them tinhorns down. That's why I made bold ter ask ye ter wait in Wagon Wheel a spell before trailin' north."

"Why did you think I'd be interested in helping you run the tinhorns down, Coleman?"

"Bekase, amigo, they was connected, in a way, with Jeff Trent."

"In what way?"

"The four in the gang are Perdita Reyes, her husband, Jorgé Reyes, an' ombray called Emil Flint, an' another as totes the label o' Jack Barbazon. Trent married a Mexican woman, years ago. The Mexican woman has been dead fer some sort of a while, but this Perdita is her daughter."

"Ah! Was Perdita out at the Circle-T Ranch during our trouble with Trent?"

"No, she wasn't there at that time. The Clique o' Gold, I reckon, didn't allow it was healthy ter happen around at the ranch while the games was on."

"Clique of Gold?"

"That's the fancy name this bunch of grafters have given themselves. The 'Gilded Clique,' or the 'Clique o' Gold' is what they call their gamblin' crowd."

"Why have you delayed telling me the reason you wanted me and my pards to wait here, Coleman?"

"I had a notion," the Ranger answered, "that Perdita might show up at the Circle-T with the rest o' the Clique arter she heard what had happened ter Trent. Gittin' the scattered tinhorns rounded up was the fust play, an' capterin' 'em was the second. I've had some o' my men watchin' the Circle-T, but they haven't discovered a thing. Horace Parmenter here is the first man ter throw a clue my way concernin' the movements of the gamblers."

At that, Buffalo Bill took a fresh interest in Horace.

"What sort of a clue has Horace got?" he asked.

"He comes ter me an' told me how he had been done up," said Coleman, "an' how he had been ter you, an' you had given him a lot o' good advice. Now, from Horace's description o' the blackleg that got his dinero, I've about made up my mind it was Jack Barbazon in disguise. I went ter investigate Barbazon, an' found that he had pulled out some time early in the night. Nigh as I kin figger his route, he struck out fer the Concho."

"Then," queried the scout, "you think that means that the members of the Clique are going to come together at the Circle-T Ranch for some object or other?"

"Ye're playin' me fer a dead-open-an'-shut, Buffalo Bill. That's exactly what I do think."

"In that event, why not ride to the Circle-T without delay, and drop a bit of a kibosh around the Clique?"

"Jest what I was about ter propose; but I don't want ter git ter the Circle-T until I'm positive the tinhorns are all thar. S'posin' we ride fer the Concho ter-morrer mornin'?"

"I'm at your service, Coleman. By that time, I hope, Pawnee Bill and the baron will have returned, so that we can all ride with you."

"Keno! If Horace's clue results in anythin', we'll git his money back fer him as a sort of a reward."

Coleman thereupon went away with Horace. Two hours later the captain of the Rangers came through the

hotel by the rear door, and called to the scout, who was sitting out in front. Buffalo Bill got up, and went into the hotel, and Coleman gripped his arm and drew him into a washroom that opened off the office.

"By the great Davy Crockett," breathed Coleman, "this here game we're playin' agin' the gamblers is openin' in a queer fashion, Buffalo Bill."

"How so?" asked the scout.

"A gal jest rode inter Wagon Wheel, an' asked fer you."

"For me?"

"That's it. I heerd her, an' seen her; then I made tracks fer the rear o' the Palmer House an' pushed through ter the front ter git a quiet word with you."

"What was the need of that?"

"I'll tell ye. This gal, if I ain't plumb locoed, is no one else but Perdita Reyes. She's in disguise, but that ain't no disguise she could put on as 'u'd kiver up that purty face an' them Spanish eyes o' hers. I'd know them eyes an' that face among a thousand. It's Perdita, an' she's lookin' fer you."

"Why for me?"

"*Quién sabe?* Thar's trouble o' some sort a-brewin', I'll bet my hat. I was jest goin' ter tip ye off as ter how ter act when ye talk with Perdita."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Fall in with her game, whatever it is. It may lead somewhere, an' help us ter accomplish somethin' wuth while. *Sabe?* It don't make no diff'rence what happens, pard, I'll be handy by—count on that."

The scout was about to reply, when Coleman dropped a hand on his arm, and pointed through the crack of the half-closed door.

"She's comin' inter the office," the Ranger whispered. "You go out an' palaver with her, but don't let her think ye've had any talk with me. I'll git through a winder, so'st she won't *sabe* I'm anywhar around the hotel."

Suiting his action to the word, Coleman turned to an outside window, opened it softly, and climbed through. The scout, unaware of the strange cross-play of circumstances fencing with his fate, opened the door, and stepped into the office.

The girl was standing in the centre of the room. When he appeared, she moved quickly toward him.

CHAPTER VII.

A WOMAN'S TREACHERY.

The girl, slender and graceful, wore a tattered calico gown, a sunbonnet, and no shoes. Her raven-black hair hung in a thick braid down her back, and she looked, at first glance, to be no more than fifteen or sixteen years old. Her face, half hidden in the shadow of the sunbonnet, however, showed that she was older than her dress and her manner would indicate.

It was a darkly beautiful face, and the eyes were superb.

"Mexican to the core," thought the scout, "even though her father was an American."

Buffalo Bill, pretending not to see the girl, started across the office toward the outside door. The girl got in his way.

"Are—are you Buffalo Bill? Please, are you Buffalo Bill?"

The voice was soft and tremulous, and the girl was breathing fast, as though under stress of deep emotion.

"I am Buffalo Bill," answered the scout.

"I want ter talk with ye, Buffalo Bill," she went on, with tearful eagerness. "I got ter talk with ye."

"Well," laughed the scout, "you'll never have a better chance. Go ahead."

"But I don't want no one out there ter hear," the girl whispered, waving a quick hand in the direction of the open door and the veranda.

"Come this way, then."

He led her to a corner of the office, seated himself, and pointed to a chair.

"If you keep your voice lowered, young lady," he went on, "no one will hear what you say, except myself. You seem to be in trouble of some kind?"

"I—I never had so—so much trouble!"

The girl's voice choked. Her face went down in her hands, and her slender body was racked with sobs.

Buffalo Bill was perplexed. To feign such grief, and do it naturally, demanded so much ability as an actress, that he was tempted to think that Coleman might be mistaken, and that the girl was not playing a part, but acting in good faith.

"Calm yourself," said the scout, in a kindly tone, "and tell me who you are, and what you want with me."

The girl dried her eyes on the cape of her sunbonnet, and looked up.

"I'm Tildy McAndrews," said she, "an' if you can't or won't help me, then there's no one on this earth I can turn to."

If the girl was really Trent's daughter, part Mexican and the wife of Jorgé Reyes, in giving the name of "Tildy McAndrews" she was accusing herself of trickery. That there was Mexican blood in the girl's veins, the scout knew without a doubt.

"Tell me what I can do for you, Miss McAndrews," said the scout.

"Pap's in a heap o' trouble," answered the girl, "an' there ain't no one but me he can depend on. Mom's dead, an' I got ter look after pap an' do everythin'. It's mighty hard, I'm tellin' ye."

"How long since you lost your mother?"

"Her name was Ann Carruthers afore she married pap, an' she died three years ago."

These words convinced the scout that he was dealing with a treacherous woman—undoubtedly with Perdita Reyes, just as Coleman had said.

"What's the matter with your father, Miss McAndrews?"

The scout, interested to discover why the daughter of Jeff Trent should come to him in that way, continued to draw the girl out.

"Why," quavered the girl, "pap got shot by Big Blake, a feller he uther work fer, an' Blake sw'ars he's comin' back ter our shanty ter finish up the job. He's due—at the shanty ter-night, an' I want ye ter go out with me an' keep Big Blake from doin' what he's intendin'."

"Who is this man Blake?"

"He's got a bunch o' cattle near our place. Pap quit workin' fer him an' went inter the mine at the foot o' Whipsaw Mountain. Blake allows pap only works in the mine fer a bluff, an' that his real bizness is rustlin' Blake's cattle. But it ain't true! Pap's honest, no matter what

else ye kin say fer him. He's plumb honest, pap is, an' he never changed a brand in his life."

"Pretty hard on your father to be accused of something he never did, eh?"

"It's hard on him," sobbed the girl, "an' it is right hard on me, too."

"When did Big Blake shoot your father?"

"Yesterday. Dad's been laid up with the shakes fer a week, an' couldn't go ter the mine. Big Blake walked in on us, an' when pap seen him comin' he scented trouble an' reached fer a gun. But Blake was too quick. He let pap have it, quicker'n a wink. I got the bullet out o' pap's shoulder, but he's in bed, an' I'm that scairt o' Blake ter-night I'm purty nigh crazy."

"Blake said he was coming to your shanty to-night?"

"That's what he said; an' I reckon he will, kase he's that kind."

"This Blake isn't bloodthirsty enough to come to your place and do any gun fighting with a wounded man, is he?"

"Ye don't know him, Buffalo Bill," breathed the girl. "He's ekal ter anythin', Big Blake is."

"But he must have some other iron in the fire, Tildy. It can't be that he's trying to do all this to your father on account of some stolen cattle."

"He wants pap ter confess, an' Blake allows he'll kill him if he don't confess. S'posin' pap, jest ter save his life, admitted that he did change Blake's brand? That 'ud save him from Blake, mebby, but it wouldn't save him from bein' arrested an' put in jail. That's what Blake's schemin' fer. He wants ter do pap up, one way 'r another. If pap had been able ter ride, I'd have brought him ter Wagon Wheel; but he can't ride—he's flat on his back in bed."

"Why have you come to me, Tildy?" inquired the scout. "The sheriff is the man you ought to see."

"The sher'ff ain't in town."

"Captain Coleman, of the Rangers, is in town, and he's a better man than the sheriff. Why don't you get him to deal with Blake?"

"Pap had trouble with the Rangers oncet," answered the girl, "an' I wouldn't go a-nigh 'em. It wasn't trouble o' pap's makin', nuther, but the Rangers got suspicious o' him. Say, if I was ter take Cap'n Coleman out there ter the shanty, more'n likely he'd side right in with Big Blake an' try ter make pap confess he'd been stealin' Blake's cattle. If ye won't come along o' me, Buffalo Bill, pap'll git killed an' I won't have no home left, an' no nothin'. I heerd ye was here in town, an' I've heerd ye're allers willin' ter help folks as can't help theirselves, so I left pap an' rode here. Will ye come, an' come right now?"

"How far is it to your shanty, Tildy?"

"Ten mile over to'rs Whipsaw Mountain. Ye won't need ter bring nobody with ye. I reckon from what I hear o' Buffalo Bill"—here her head went up, and a flicker of awe and admiration flashed in her eyes—"he won't ask no odds o' a feller like Big Blake."

"I reckon he won't, Tildy," smiled the scout. "Wait till I get my guns and I'll ride out to your home with you."

"I knowed ye wouldn't turn me down," whispered the girl. "Ye're jest the kind o' man I've heerd ye was."

A little sadness mingled with the scout's curiosity as he went upstairs to his room to get his belt and guns. How a girl like Perdita Reyes could play so contempti-

ble a part, and play it so well, was a problem that struck hard against the chivalrous side of his nature. Why she was playing the part was the problem—and this quite apart from the suggestion made by Coleman—that led him to agree to go with her. By running out the trail he would surely discover what lay at the farther end of it.

He came down with his guns buckled about his waist and went out through the rear door of the hotel to get riding gear on Bear Paw. When he had mounted and started toward the trail the girl joined him.

She was riding a sorry-looking mustang, bareback and with a bridle that had been patched in half a dozen places.

The scout was conscious of a certain amount of admiration for this fair trickster. There was nothing of the Mexicana in her talk, but every word was true to her assumed character of an uneducated American girl of the frontier. Her tattered gown, her bare feet, her sunbonnet, even the ragged little mustang with the bare back and the patched bridle, all lent an air of truth to her story. Yes, she was a clever woman; there could be no mistake on that score.

"We got ter hurry, Buffalo Bill," said the girl. "D'ye reckon ye can keep up with me?"

"I reckon I can," laughed the scout.

"Then hyer goes!"

She struck the mustang's sides with her bare heels and the little animal wabbled into a gallop. Bear Paw could have traveled six feet to the mustang's three, and not half tried, but the scout drew his war horse down to a gait that matched the pony's.

"I'm plumb tickled ter think ye're comin' along," remarked the girl, as they galloped side by side. "Pap allowed ye was too busy ter bother with po' white folks like us-all, but I knowed differ'nt."

The scout made no response, and for mile after mile they rode in silence. The trail to Whipsaw Mountain led into rough country, and the country grew hillier and rockier as they advanced.

The scout was casting up the possibilities that might lie ahead of him. The girl, playing so desperate a rôle, was surely not considering the scout's welfare in the least. Her plot, whatever it was, was against him; and his knowledge of this was to be his principal weapon against threatening disaster. At the end of the trail he would at least discover the correctness or the falsity of Coleman's judgment regarding the girl and the gamblers.

Buffalo Bill's reflections were brought to an abrupt termination. His companion's hands suddenly dropped the reins of the patched bridle; she gave a gasp, caught at the mustang's mane to hold herself on his back, and then, with a low moan, slid to the ground and lay there.

Buffalo Bill reached out and grabbed the mustang by a bit ring, at the same time drawing Bear Paw to a halt. Pulling the reins over the mustang's head, he laid a loop of them around his saddle horn and quickly dismounted.

"What's the matter, Tildy?" he asked, stepping to the girl's side.

"I'm—I'm about played out, I reckon," whispered the girl, trying feebly to rise, but falling back. "I didn't sleep a wink all last night, I was that scairt on account o' Big Blake. I reckon if I had a drink o' water I could go on. Git me a drink, will ye, Buffalo Bill? There's a crick jest over that 'rise' on the left. Bring it in yer

hat—but leave me one o' yer guns while ye're gone. I don't reckon I got the strength to use a gun, but I'd feel safer with it. I'm scairt ter be alone."

"I'll get the water, Tildy," said the scout.

Then, very gravely, he drew one of his revolvers from his belt and laid it down beside the girl. Following this he hurried up the "rise," over it, and a little way down on the opposite side.

Removing his hat, just below the crest of the ridge, he turned, dropped to his knees and stole a backward glance at the girl.

What he saw left not the least doubt of her treachery.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LITTLE TWO-GUN GAME.

The scout was not deceived by this ruse of the girl's. Her professed weakness, accompanied though it was by consummate acting, in no wise struck at his credulity. Had he so willed, he could have lifted her and carried her over the "rise" to the creek. However, he offered no suggestions, but calmly met the girl's every wish with promptness, even to letting her have his revolver.

As he turned and looked warily back from the ridge crest, he saw the girl rise alertly to a sitting posture, cast a hurried glance at the top of the "rise," then pick up the revolver and begin removing the cartridges from the cylinder. These she cast from her, into the rocks that bordered the trail; and then, from the bosom of her dress, she took a small bag, emptied something into her hand and stuffed the six chambers with—well, the scout was positive that his trusty weapon had been filled with "blanks."

"Tildy, Tildy," murmured the scout ironically, as he turned and went down the slope of the ridge, "you're trying to have me helpless when we reach your shanty. This gives the whole play a bad look, and you'll be in for a big surprise before you're many hours older."

He reached the creek, scooped up a little watr in his hat and calmly carried it back to his waiting companion. The girl had resumed her weak and helpless attitude and the revolver, apparently, was lying where the scout had placed it.

"I reckon ye'll think I ain't got no sand at all," murmured the girl, "but I'm jest plumb tuckered, no two ways about it."

"This water will revive you," returned the scout.

"I reckon that's what I need—that an' a little rest from all the worry I've been havin'."

He lifted her to a sitting posture and supported her while she allowed a little of the water to run over the brim of the tilted Stetson and between her lips.

"Obliged ter ye, Buffalo Bill," said she. "Now if ye'll help me ter Baldy's back ag'in we'll be ridin'. I don't feel easy a minit while I'm away from pap."

The scout assisted her to mount, and she sat drooping on Baldy's back in a way that still further aroused the scout's admiration.

"Hadn't you better ride behind me on my horse?" queried the scout, after he had swung into the saddle, his revolver once more in his belt.

"I druther stay with Baldy," she answered.

"You didn't have any use for the revolver, I see."

"I reckoned I wouldn't, Buffalo Bill. I jest felt safer with it, that's all. It's astonishin' how much safer a person'll feel, now an' then, if they got a shooter handy."

"You're right, Tildy. A gun that can be depended on has brought nerve and confidence to many a man in a tight corner. But who were you afraid of?"

"Big Blake—the feller I was a-tellin' ye of."

"You haven't any notion that Big Blake is trailing you, have you?"

"I'm that scairt I don't know what ter think."

They were riding on again, the girl swaying a little on the mustang's back and continuing to play her part with all the frills. The scout pretended to be very anxious.

"I think, Tildy," said he, after they had covered another mile of the trail, "that we could make better time if you'd dismount and rest up a bit. The first thing we know, you'll have another fall from Baldy's back."

"Mebby ye're right, Buffalo Bill," she answered. "If ye'll give me a hand down, I reckon I'll stop right hyer. Ever'thin's swimmin' around me—never was so pesky dizzy."

Promptly the scout drew rein, assisted the girl to alight and then supported her as she staggered into a scrap of shade cast by some trailside bushes. She sank down wearily.

"I dunno what ye'll think o' me," she murmured.

Buffalo Bill had no sort of doubt on that point, but he answered gravely:

"Never mind about that, Tildy. Our business is to get to your shanty before Big Blake arrives there. I reckon we'll make it all right, so don't fret."

"I ain't frettin' much, now ye've come along with me ter stand between pap an' Blake. I reckon," she went on, "I'd feel a heap better if I had a piece o' sassafras bark ter chew on. It's mighty heartenin' when a person feels all gone an' down. D'y'e s'pose ye could find me some?"

"I can look for it, anyhow."

"Don't be gone too long, an' don't fergit ter leave me one o' your guns fer comp'ny."

He saw her watching him, covertly but with catlike vigilance, while he took the revolver from his belt. The other time he had left her the weapon that swung on his right side. This time he carefully gave her the other revolver. A gleam appeared and vanished in her eyes as he laid the six-shooter at her feet.

"Ye won't be gone long, will ye?" she implored.

"No," he answered.

"If ye can't find no sassafras in a few minits, don't waste time huntin'. I'll make shift ter git along somehow without it."

"I'll be back in five minutes."

The scout got out of sight as quickly as he could and then, taking the revolver from his belt, he assured himself beyond all doubt that the girl had really replaced the ball cartridges in the cylinder with "blanks."

"She doesn't give me credit for very much headwork," murmured the scout, "when she plays the same game twice. "But," he finished, as he proceeded to replenish the weapon with ammunition he could depend on, "this is a two-gun game that two can play at."

Throwing the blank cartridges away, he proceeded to kill a few minutes of time by an aimless wandering among the rocks and bushes. Finally he returned to the girl.

"I reckon this isn't a very good place for sassafras," said he. "Anyhow, Tildy, I couldn't locate any."

"It's right nice o' ye ter go lookin' fer it, anyways," she answered gratefully. "I'll tell pap how kind ye was ter me an' he'll be a heap grateful."

The scout scooped up his revolver from the place where it was lying and dropped it into its scabbard. If anything went wrong with him before he had a chance to reload that second weapon, there was still one on which he could rely.

"Do you feel able to travel now, Tildy," the scout asked, "or do you want to rest a while longer?"

"I can't rest fer thinkin' o' pap," said she. "Mebby we'd better be hittin' the trail."

"You can ride with me, if you like."

"Baldy's hard ter lead an' it'll be a heap easier, all around, fer me ter ride him."

He helped her to mount, once more, and they rode on. The farce, in so far as it had to do with getting the scout entangled with a brace of supposedly useless guns, had been played through. All that remained, now, was to carry out the rest of the plot.

If the girl was really Perdita Reyes, the scout felt sure that she was scheming to secure vengeance on account of her father. That a girl could deliberately plan so murderous a proceeding, and then carry it out so craftily, were points that gave him food for much unpleasant thought.

The same silence settled over them now that had marked the beginning of their ride. Buffalo Bill, however, took care to ride very close to the girl, to watch her covertly but keenly, and also to take stock of the trailside as they passed along.

There were so many ways in which further treachery could be leveled at a supposedly defenseless man, that Buffalo Bill took note of the rocks and brush for an ambush quite as often as he watched for some hostile movement on the part of the girl herself.

A spice of danger added attractiveness to that queer journey toward Whipsaw Mountain. The scout's wits alone lay between him and calamity, and he felt a keen pleasure in relying on his alertness of mind, and in beating the girl at her own game.

In due course they turned from the trail into a blind road leading among the rocks and bushes. A hundred yards from the main trail they emerged upon a little plateau lying in an arm of a creek.

A small adobe house stood in the centre of the plateau, and back of the house, on the creek bank, was a little corral.

"Hyer's the place, Buffalo Bill," said the girl.

"Buenos!" exclaimed the scout. "I'll take care of the horses, Tildy, while you go on in to your father."

The girl hesitated. The part she was playing called for her to take the scout at his word, while a suspicion, perhaps, that he might discover something demanded that she go with him to the corral. She took a chance, evidently, with her suspicion, and dismounted and walked unsteadily toward the front door of the adobe.

"There's baled hay by the c'r'l, Buffalo Bill," said the girl. "I ort ter take keer o' the hosses myself, but ye'll understand why I don't. If I can git sot down, close ter where pap is, I'll feel a heap better."

She disappeared inside the house, and the scout, leading Baldy, rode toward the corral. As he passed the side of the house he looked through a window and saw a man lying in a bunk.

"Everything has been fixed up nicely for me," thought the scout. "It won't be long now, until I know what the game is. The girl will find, I think, that she has trapped a hornet."

At the corral gate he stripped riding gear from both horses and turned them into the inclosure; then he threw some hay over the fence—incidentally reloading the second revolver while the fence screened him from the windows of the adobe—and finally turned and made his way back toward the door through which the girl had vanished.

CHAPTER IX.

"TRAPPING A HORNET."

Buffalo Bill had not neglected to cast a critical eye over the surroundings of the house and the corral. There were cottonwoods and bushes along the creek, and the small stream crooked in such a way that this shelter of undergrowth almost surrounded the adobe and the fenced inclosure. Danger might be lurking in the brush for the scout, but to take a closer look in the thickets might have aroused suspicion on the part of the girl. Undoubtedly, he reasoned, she was watching him from the house windows.

Coleman believed that the girl was Perdita Reyes. Also, Coleman was anxious to round up the Clique, of which the girl was a member, and he no doubt had a presentiment that this move against the scout might involve Jorgé Reyes, Emil Flint, and Jack Barbazon. The scout thought he could see through Coleman's suggestions very clearly, and he was glad to run the risk and find out just how far right or wrong the captain of the Rangers might be.

The adobe was a relic of the days when Comanches and Apaches used to make their raids against the cattle-men of the country, for there were wooden shutters at the windows and loopholes pierced in the walls. The shutters were swinging wide open, and the scout could not discover that any weapon menaced him from the loopholes.

The girl had left the door ajar. With seeming carelessness he stepped through the door. The carelessness was only assumed, and at any moment the scout could have conjured a weapon into his hand with paralyzing suddenness and made other lightninglike moves in his own defense.

The interior of the house consisted of but one room. There was no loft, and the ceiling of the room were the pole rafters and woven grass covered with clay that formed the roof.

What struck the scout most was the utter absence of furniture in the place. There was a bunk, and a three-

legged stool beside it. Likewise there was a blanket to cover the man in the bunk. But even the most primitive housekeeping calls for a stove or a fireplace, and a few other domestic odds and ends which were not in this dwelling.

The man in the bunk was in his shirt sleeves. His hands were under the blanket and there was a bandage over his shoulder. Nevertheless there was nothing about his face to indicate that he was suffering from a wound. His eyes were clear and his face was bronzed and tinged with the hue of perfect health.

The girl was sitting on the stool at the man's side. She got up, as the scout came into the room.

"Hyer's pap, Buffalo Bill," said she. "I been tellin' him how good you-all was ter me. He's mighty obliged. Ain't ye, pap?"

"Ye know it, gal," answered the man. "Set down, Buffler Bill," he added. "Make yerself as comfortable as ye kin."

The scout's mood was one of expectancy. How much longer was the girl going to keep up her tactics?

Buffalo Bill seated himself.

"How are you feeling, McAndrews?" he asked.

"Fair ter middlin'," grinned McAndrews.

"You don't look very much as though you were on your last legs, and that's a fact. Sort of camping out here, aren't you?"

"Sort of," agreed the man readily.

"I suppose you live closer to the mines when you're able to work?"

"You bet," was the answer. "Close the door, gal," he went on to the girl. "If Big Blake comes, ye know, we want ter hev him shut out."

"I'd suggest," said Buffalo Bill, "that you let Big Blake come in. I want to meet him, face to face."

The girl, however, went on closing the door and fastened it by dropping a heavy wooden bar into iron brackets.

When the scout turned his eyes from the girl to the man, he was not particularly surprised to note that the man had flung the blanekt aside and lifted his hands. In one of the hands was a revolver, and the revolver was leveled.

"This has gone far enotigh!" snapped the man in the bunk.

The scout, in his best manner, started to his feet, evidently startled.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"It will take a little time to go into that," was the answer. "You'd better sit down and make yourself comfortable—while you can."

"What sort of a game are you trying to play on me?" cried the scout.

"We've passed the trying point, Buffalo Bill," chuckled the man. "You're here and in our hands, and all that remains is to put on the finishing touches."

The scout's hand jumped at his belt and clasped one of his weapons. A shrill laugh burst from the girl.

"That will do you no good, Buffalo Bill," she taunted. "I have taken care of your revolvers. You kindly left them with me, you remember, when you went for water and to hunt for sassafras. The guns are filled with blanks."

Buffalo Bill staggered back, brushing a hand across his forehead.

"Then you deceived me?" he asked. "There's no such man as Big Blake? Your father was not shot, and Big Blake is not coming?"

"All a frame-up," said the man in the bunk, his eye glimmering exultantly across his revolver sights. "Perdita, there, is entitled to the credit."

"Perdita!"

The scout turned to look at the girl. She had cast aside her sunbonnet and was standing erect, her back against the barred door.

"Yes," she jeered, twin demons glaring from her eyes and her face losing its beauty in a diabolical expression that twisted through it, "Perdita, Perdita Reyes. I told you I was Tildy McAndrews just to get you here where Barbazon and I could have you at our mercy. Jefferson Trent is my father. What mercy did you and your pards show him? Buffalo Bill," and the words came hissing through her red lips, "Barbazon and I are going to show you the same sort of mercy. *Madre mia!* The great king of scouts is no match for a determined woman! You walked into this trap in a way I could scarcely have believed possible."

There was contempt in the very tones of Perdita's voice.

"Well," murmured the scout, "this is news! But I can't understand—the whole thing is somewhat mixed." He dropped back on the stool, wrinkling his brows. "This is a trap. You say that you have tampered with my revolvers and that they are useless. I take it that you are trying to get revenge for what happened to Jeff Trent."

"That's the way you can take it," said Barbazon. "Another thing for you to know, Buffalo Bill, is that, at this same moment, your pard, Pawnee Bill, is having a similar rhinecaboob run in on him at Montezuma, and your other pard is being treated the same at the camp on Whipsaw Mountain. Jorgé Reyes is looking after Pawnee Bill, and Emil Flint after the Dutchman. They both have helpers."

Here, for the first time, the scout was receiving a really startling piece of news.

"Then," said he, "this plot is leveled against my two pards as well as against me?"

"It is," cried the girl viciously. "For what you and your two pards have done to my father, you are all about to feel the weight of the vengeance of the Gilded Clique."

"Explain a little," begged the scout. "I seem to be perfectly helpless here and you ought not to begrudge me an explanation before you wind up this end of your three-cornered plot."

"Keep the revolver leveled, Barbazon!" breathed the girl. "Better make him move to the other side of the room—he's too close to you and might try to use his hands. They say, amigo, that he can be quicker than chain lightning."

"You hear?" asked Barbazon, making a suggestive movement with his revolver.

The scout backed obediently away.

"Stand between the windows!" ordered the girl. "Don't get in front of one of them."

The scout placed himself as directed.

"Now," went on the girl, "listen. I went to the Circle-T Ranch and found that the games had been called off, and that *mi padre* had been arrested and taken away to be tried and convicted as a counterfeiter. I was told, too, that you and your two pards, Buffalo Bill, were responsible." Fiercely she raised her hand and dashed it against her breast.

"When a Mexicana is treated so," she cried, "she thinks only of vengeance—and she has a head to plan and a heart to dare. I sent at once for my husband, Jorgé, and for Jack Barbazon, there, and Emil Flint. They came, and we planned. When too late, we discovered that a Dutchman had been listening to us. That Dutchman got away, but he was captured. Without losing a moment we started to carry out our plot against Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, and that other Dutchman, your pard.

"At first, we were going to take you and your pards one at a time; then, after our trouble with the Dutchman, we decided to divide forces and take you all at the same time. You see how Barbazon and I have succeeded; and I want to tell you, Buffalo Bill, that you will never leave this house alive! Do you doubt what I say?"

The scout absently drew one of his revolvers.

"If this," said he, flourishing the weapon, "had not been tampered with, I certainly should doubt what you say, Perdita; but, as it is—"

The scout's finger pressed the trigger. There followed a crash and a yell of pain from Barbazon. His revolver hand dropped, pierced with a ball.

"You lied to me!" he howled, half throwing himself from the bed, "you told me you had drawn his fangs!"

"Stand where you are, Perdita Reyes!" ordered the scout. Both revolvers were in his hands, one trained on the man and the other on the girl. "I have held this little surprise in store for you right up to the last minute. There are eleven lives left in these guns—in spite of

your tampering. Don't make a move, either of you, or you'll have cause to regret it."

Perdita, pallid as death, fell limply back against the door behind her.

CHAPTER X.

PERDITA, THE WILD CAT.

For a moment, the silence in the room was broken only by the stifled groans and the muffled oaths of Jack Barbazon. His emotions seemed equally divided between the pain of his wound and his anger against Perdita.

"You she-fiend!" ground out Barbazon, hurling the words at the girl like so many daggers; "what did you tell me the scout's guns were harmless for when they were not?"

"Don't blame her for that, Barbazon," said the scout. "She thought she had fixed my guns—and so she had, only I discovered it and reloaded the cylinders."

Throwing one arm over her face, Perdita slipped to her knees with a low moan.

"*Pardoname, señor!*" she whimpered, crawling toward the scout. "Mercy for me and Barbazon, *señor*."

She twisted and writhed in her abject despair, finally coming so close to the scout that she could reach out and clasp his knees convulsively.

"None of that, Perdita!" said the scout sharply, stepping away from her. "There's too much of the fiend in you for such an exhibition as this, or—"

Like a flash she sprang up and threw herself recklessly against the weapons in the scout's hands.

"Quick, Barbazon!" she screeched. "Pick up the gun—use it—use your left hand—*pronto!*"

Like a wild cat Perdita struggled to deprive Buffalo Bill of his revolvers, or at least to prevent him from using them. From somewhere about her dress she had plucked a dagger and, with eyes glittering and her face contorted with hate and fury, she sought to use the blade.

Very easily the scout could have brought one of his six-shooters to bear upon the girl, but his nature rebelled against such a move. Perdita, perhaps, was not entitled to much consideration, but, for all that she had done and was doing, she was a woman.

Dropping one of his revolvers, the scout clasped the girl's slender wrist in his hand and wrenched at it until a gasp of pain fell from her lips and the dagger dropped to the floor.

Barbazon, hoping against hope that something might yet be accomplished, had nerved himself for a supreme effort. With his left hand he had picked up the revolver, and, on his knees, was waiting for an opportunity to get in a shot at the scout.

Buffalo Bill's struggle with the girl made it impossible for Barbazon to shoot with any degree of certainty. The scout, keeping track of what the man was doing, carefully held the girl in line with the leveled revolver. Presently, giving the girl a swift backward push, he threw her against the kneeling Barbazon.

Barbazon was thrown back against the edge of the bunk by the weight of the girl's body, and the girl fell to her hands and knees. Once more the revolver dropped from Barbazon's hand.

With a quick forward jump, Buffalo Bill reached the weapon and kicked it across the room; he then stepped back and planted his heel on the dagger's blade, grinding down until he snapped the steel in half.

"Get up!" he ordered, addressing the girl.

Slowly Perdita arose.

"What good did that move do us?" snarled Barbazon. "Make the best of this, now. The scout's too much for us."

Perdita muttered something under her breath, her gleaming eyes shooting defiance the while at Buffalo Bill.

"Have you any more weapons about you, Perdita?" demanded the scout.

"If I had," she hissed, "I'd turn them against myself for letting me be duped by a gringo Chingado. *Por Dios*, I ought to die for this!"

"Perhaps you ought, but not by my hand and much less by your own. Allow me to point out to you, *señora*, that your energies have been misdirected. You have aimed to plot at me and my pards on the score of your father, Jeff Trent. Your father had broken the laws of the country, and the punishment he is to receive he richly deserves. There is nothing in that for which you should seek revenge on me. If you were not a woman—"

"It has been the sorrow of my life that I am a woman!" shrilled Perdita, stamping the floor with one of her small, bare feet. "I have cursed my fate ever since I was a child because I had not been born a man. But enough of that! I have failed, Buffalo Bill, but Jorgé will not fail in dealing with your pard, Pawnee Bill; nor will Emil Flint fail in taking care of the Dutchman."

Although herself beaten and baffled, the girl was in a mood to exult over the work the other two members of the Clique were doing, and to torture the scout by telling him of it.

"You can't expect me to believe such locoed talk as that," said the scout, by way of goading the girl into telling him more.

"It is true! By all the saints, it is true!"

"How is Jorgé to deal with my pard, Pawnee Bill?"

A crafty, snakelike smile wreathed the girl's lips.

"He sends a cowboy to Pawnee Bill, *señor*—a cowboy

from the Circle-T who is not known to your pard. That cowboy tells Pawnee Bill that Buffalo Bill is wanting him at once, in Wagon Wheel Gap. Will Pawnee Bill heed the summons? *Si*, you know he will! The prince of the bowie rides, and among the rocks where the trail follows the rim of Bowie Gulch, a force of Circle-T men, captained by Jules, the half-breed foreman, will be waiting."

The scout was deeply impressed by this talk. It was a plot that could be easily carried out, and, withal, it was so simple that it scarcely seemed likely to fail. Pawnee Bill knew that the scout was waiting to hear from Captain Coleman. The summons, brought by the strange cowboy, would lead the prince of the bowie to infer that Coleman had sent in his call.

Perdita, watching the scout's face with weazel eyes, caught the drift of his thoughts. She laughed mockingly.

"So, señor," she breathed, "although you have saved yourself, yet it is bitterness for you to know that Pawnee Bill is already in another trap."

"Such fiendish work cannot succeed," declared the scout calmly. "What has your Clique attempted against my Dutch pard, the baron?"

"Ah!" murmured the girl, "that is even better! Emil Flint dresses himself like one of the Rangers and rides to the camp on Whipsaw Mountain. The Dutchman is there. Emil tells the Dutchman that he has come from Captain Coleman and Buffalo Bill, and that the Dutchman is to ride down the mountain at once. There is a lake at the mountain's foot, and around this lake and a little way up the stream that forms its outlet is the stamp mill of the mine. On the left of the lake's bank there are trees. The trail down the mountain passes through the woods, and there, when Emil comes with the Dutchman, more men will be waiting."

The comprehensive nature of all this plotting made a deep impression upon the scout. Everything had been well planned, so that the designs against all three of the pards could be carried out simultaneously.

"Who is at the back of all this villainy?" he asked.

"I, Perdita Reyes!" cried the girl exultantly.

"Then you, Perdita Reyes, by this confession to me, have placed a noose around your throat and Barbazon's. If but one of your plans succeed, it will spell destruction for you."

"*Madre mio!*" flamed Perdita. "What is that to me?" She struck her breast with her clenched fist. "All I care for is to let Buffalo Bill and his pards feel the weight of the Clique's vengeance. I may lose my life, and so may Barbazon, but Jorgé and Emil are free."

Barbazon was not so complacent over the prospect outlined by Perdita.

"Confound you, Perdita," he cried, sitting on the floor and rocking back and forth with the pain of his wound, "speak for yourself and not for me!"

She spurned him with her bare foot.

"Dog!" she hissed. "Cur! What would Jorgé and Emil say if they could hear you talk?"

"I'm thinking of my own hide, and Jorgé and Emil would do the same thing, if they were in my place. Bind up this hand for me, somebody."

With his left hand he raised his right arm. It was not a bad wound the scout had inflicted, but it was a wound calculated to make Barbazon's hand useless for revolver work.

"Bind it up for him," said the scout to the girl.

"No!" she flung back, and turned away.

"She's got as much feeling as a copperhead, just about," growled Barbazon. "After getting me into this, and making a bobble of her part of it, she turns on me and—"

Without the least warning, a rifle banged suddenly outside the adobe.

A window crashed to fragments behind the scout and he felt a quick tug at the sleeve of his coat as a bullet fanned past him across the room and buried itself in the opposite wall. He whirled to take note of the marksman. At the same moment, Perdita leaped for the door, closely followed by Barbazon.

The scout heard the running feet and turned back. Barbazon was between him and Perdita. Even had he been so disposed he could not have launched a shot at the girl. He called on her to stop, but she answered with a defiant laugh. Flinging the bar from the door she jumped out of the house. Before Barbazon could follow suit, however, the scout had him by the shoulder, and had thrown him back. The next moment the scout had the door closed again and the bar in place.

CHAPTER XI.

COLEMAN RAISES THE SIEGE.

"Who did that?" asked the scout sharply, turning upon Barbazon and pointing to the smashed window.

"One of the Circle-T men, I reckon," answered the gambler sullenly.

"There are Circle-T men outside?"

"There was to be."

"How many?"

"Two."

"And you and the girl were planning to keep me occupied in talk until those two Circle-T punchers got a chance at me through one of the windows?"

"I don't know what that viper of a Mexicana had in mind, but I haven't been thinking much about anything except this hand."

Bang! went another rifle, and crash! went another

window. The bullet did little more than break the glass, however, and embed itself in the end wall of the adobe.

"They'll get you, Buffalo Bill," declared Barbazon.

"If they do," answered the scout significantly, "it won't help your case any, Barbazon."

The gambler, lifting his eyes quickly to the scout, paled at the determination he read in the scout's face.

"You mean——"

"You know what I mean, well enough," cut in the scout. "Step to one of those broken windows. Don't try to bolt through the opening, for I shall have you covered. Tell those scoundrels outside that if they capture me, there'll be one gambler the less on this part of the range."

"They'll shoot me if I show myself!" demurred Barbazon. "You saw how Perdita felt when she left here."

"You'll take that chance, Barbazon. Move to the window!"

The scout was looking at Barbazon over his revolver sights. There was nothing else for it, and the gambler obeyed orders.

Through the broken windowpane he called out to the girl and the two cowboys as he had been instructed to do. A jeering laugh was his answer.

"Tell Buffalo Bill," came the girl's high-pitched voice, "that we care nothing what happens to you, Jack Barbazon."

"You hear?" asked Barbazon, turning his white face toward the scout.

"I hear, certainly," was the cool response. "Close and fasten the shutters at that window, Barbazon."

With his left hand the gambler managed to lift the window and to close the heavy shutters. But he was growing weak and dizzy, and he staggered as he turned away from the window.

"Close all the shutters," ordered the scout. "It is safer for you to do that than for me. The villains outside wouldn't drop you with a bullet, Barbazon."

"I'm about played out," mumbled the gambler, "and I wouldn't bet very heavy that Perdita and the Circle-T men wouldn't have any compunctions about putting a bullet into me. I'm between the devil and the deep sea, though, and it makes little difference how I'm snuffed out."

He reeled to the other broken window, raised the sash and drew the blinds shut. There was only one more window and, on his way to it, he staggered and fell. Buffalo Bill leaped to the opening, flung up the window and jerked the shutters toward him.

Two rifles snarled outside and the stout wood shivered under the impact of the bullets. Only one slug penetrated the shutter, however, and the force of that one was spent so that it dropped harmlessly to the floor of the cabin.

The scout, whirling around in the half-darkened room, saw that Barbazon was still lying where he had fallen.

"I'll tie up that hand of yours now," said the scout, crossing to the gambler and kneeling at his side.

"It's a small thing, I reckon," muttered Barbazon, between his teeth, "but it's taking the strength all out of me."

These was a useless bandage around Barbazon's shoulder. The scout removed it and swiftly bound it around the injured hand. Then he passed his groping fingers over the upper part of the gambler's body.

"Any more weapons, Barbazon?" he asked.

"All I had was that gun you knocked out of my hand," was the answer. "If I had a dozen six-shooters, though, I wouldn't be able to use them."

Satisfied that Barbazon had spoken the truth, the scout arose and picked up the weapon he had kicked to the other side of the room.

"Get into the bunk, Barbazon," he commanded, "and stay there. I'll attend to the fighting and you'll consider yourself a prisoner."

The gambler rolled into the bunk and the scout stepped to one of the loopholes. The small aperture commanded the north side of the adobe. Well toward the cottonwoods and the underbrush that bordered the creek the scout could see Perdita, talking with one of the Circle-T punchers.

Placing the muzzle of his six-shooter through the loophole, the scout trained the piece at a sharp angle and pressed the trigger.

The angle proved too great for effective shooting, and the bullet passed to the left of the cowboy—but not much to the left. Both the man and the girl gave startled leaps backward.

"Get any one?" inquired Barbazon.

"No."

"I understood, Buffalo Bill, that you were a crack shot."

"I can come pretty close to a target, Barbazon, when it's in range. Tell me this: Did Perdita give me the straight of it in her talk about what was going on in Montezuma and the Whipsaw camp?"

"Yes, so far as I know."

The scout crossed the room to a loophole in the opposite wall. He could see no one from that side, but the glimmer of the sun on a rifle barrel among the bushes left no doubt that the adobe was watched on the south as well as on the north.

What the scout wanted was to get away from the adobe, get astride Bear Paw and ride at speed for Montezuma. Perhaps it was not yet too late to do something for Pawnee Bill. Plans, such as Perdita and the rest of the Clique had laid, would be subject to unforeseen delays, and the scout might reach his pard in time to

prevent disaster from overtaking him. After that, the baron could be looked after.

But how was the scout to leave the cabin with those two armed men on the watch? He would not only have to leave the cabin but also go to the corral and get the riding gear upon Bear Paw.

The sun was almost at the setting. When night came there was a chance that the darkness would befriend him and enable him to work his will.

"You'd better keep a close watch on those Circle-T men," cautioned Barbazon from the bunk. "I've a scalp to win or lose by having you get clear, remember. That Perdita is foxy, and what she can't think up isn't worth anybody's time. Look out for her, Buffalo Bill."

The scout crossed the room again. He had instant proof, at his first look through one of the loopholes, that the girl's brain had been busy.

A movable breastwork was advancing toward the north side of the adobe. This breastwork looked as though it had once been the door of a house and was constructed of heavy timbers. Two iron hinges, one of them broken, clung to one edge of the framework. There were two holes in the breastwork, some three feet down from the top, and through these were thrust the barrel of a rifle and of a six-shooter. The upright framework approached by erratic leaps, a step at a time, manipulated by the girl and the cowboy who were evidently behind it.

"Well?" called Barbazon.

"They've got a movable fort and are advancing this way with it," said the scout.

"It's the old door!" muttered the gambler. "Trust Perdita to think of that."

"Where did it come from?"

"Jorgé had a new one put on this adobe and the old one laid out back of the corral."

"Then this is Jorgé's place?"

"Yes. He used to live here before he married Perdita and took to the cards. Jorgé's father lived here before him, and his father's father. When the plans were laid to entrap you, Buffalo Bill, this old adobe naturally suggested itself."

"I see. The girl and the Circle-T puncher will probably come right up to the wall under cover of that old door and then blaze away through one of the loopholes in the wall. I'll see what I can do toward laying a bit of lead through a hole in the door."

The scout aimed carefully and fired. It was a difficult target he had, for the door was jerking and wabbling, and never quiet for a second. The small aperture at which he fired, too, would have been a difficult thing to hit, almost filled, as it was, by the menacing barrel leveled from the rear of the breastwork.

As a matter of fact, the scout's bullet hit the rifle barrel, ringing against it and glancing off into space.

Both the rifle and the six-shooter answered, the bullets thudding against the side of the house.

Buffalo Bill felt that the situation was becoming acute. Protected by the door, the girl and the cowboy could come directly up to the house wall, demolish the shutters, draw away and then comb the interior of the adobe with flying lead.

Just when the crisis was almost at hand, the cowboy from the south side of the house appeared moving around the bend of the creek bank. He was on his horse and showed considerable excitement. Reaching a point at the edge of the timber line directly back of the two who were operating the door, he yelled and waved his arms. What he said the scout could not hear, but it had instant and tremendous effect on Perdita and the cowboy who was with her.

They dropped the door and bounded away at the top of their speed. The astounded scout watched them vanish into the undergrowth. The next glimpse he had of them they were all three mounted and splashing across the creek.

"What's going on, Buffalo Bill?" inquired Barbazon.

"That's a point I'm going to settle right now," the scout answered, hastening toward the door.

Hurling aside the bar he drew open the door and stepped out into the gathering evening shadows. A shout reached his ears, breaking through a wild clatter of running hoofs.

Coming along the trail he glimpsed a couple of shadowy horsemen. When they had come closer, he discovered that they were Rangers, and that one of them was Captain Coleman.

"By Jupiter!" muttered the scout; "I was forgetting all about Coleman."

CHAPTER XII.

A DOUBLE SURPRISE.

The scout remembered, now, that Coleman, in advising him to fall into any game the girl might offer, had declared that he would be handily by. The swift run of events had blotted this from the scout's mind.

The Rangers pulled to a halt.

"*Buenos, compadre!*" called the captain.

"Howdy, Coleman," answered the scout. "I see you got here."

"After a delay. Hank an' me lost sight of you an' the gal, and have been wastin' valuable time bushwhacking in the wrong direction. A little while ago we heard shootin' an' that put us on the right track."

"You followed Perdita and me from Wagon Wheel?"

"Si, but quite a ways behind. I had ter pick up Hank. Who was you exchangin' shots with?"

"With Perdita and two Circle-T cowboys."

"They was outside the cabin?"

"Yes."

"Whar are they now?"

"They heard you coming and took to their heels."

Coleman swore disappointedly.

"Which way did they hike?"

The scout indicated the direction, and the Rangers chased away into the gathering gloom. Buffalo Bill went back into the house.

"Coleman got here, eh?" queried Barbazon, from the dark.

"Yes," answered the scout.

"From what I heard of your talk, I reckon you planned that he was to follow you and Perdita."

"That was Coleman's plan, Barbazon. I'd forgotten about it."

"Then Perdita didn't have things quite so much her own way as she thought?"

"Not quite."

"You knew who she was all the while she was making that play as Tildy McAndrews?"

"I had a notion."

"When she exchanged the ball cartridges in your guns for blanks you knew that, too, and reloaded when she didn't see you?"

"Yes."

There was a moment's silence, broken at last by a low laugh from Barbazon.

"This isn't likely to prove any laughing matter for you, Barbazon," said the scout.

"I've saved my scalp, anyhow," was the response, "and it's humorous to see that wild cat get her come-up-with, for once. I reckon you're the only man who could have matched wits with her and won out. You knew, every minute you were riding this way, that you were coming into a trap?"

"I thought that was the case."

"Why did you come on and take the risk?"

"To find out what Perdita's game was—to get to the bottom of the plot."

"Well, I take off my hat to you, Buffalo Bill. It was a bold game, but what you've found out won't help your pards any. Pawnee Bill may be as sharp as you are, but that Dutchman is as good as wiped out."

The scout was silent. He could not very well leave Barbazon, and he was itching to get a saddle and bridle on Bear Paw and to be riding toward Montezuma.

"What can you do to me for this little flare up?" queried Barbazon.

"Not much," said the scout. "You won't be brought to book for what happened to-day, Barbazon, but for a little work your Clique pulled off."

"What was that?"

"Shooting a man who discovered that a table holdout

was being used to get his money. The man has died in San Antone."

Barbazon muttered under his breath.

"It wasn't me done that," he said, "but Jorge."

"The Clique is held responsible," went on the scout, "and the Rangers have been trying to round you gamblers up for some time."

"Well, anyhow," said Barbazon philosophically, "I'm better off than I would have been if the cabin had been stormed by Perdita and the Circle-T men."

"You certainly are!" averred the scout.

At that moment Coleman and his companion came pounding back to the door of the cabin. The captain dismounted and hurried into the room.

"Whar are ye, Buffalo Bill?" the Ranger called.

"Here," the scout answered.

"It's darker'n a pocket in this cabin. Why don't ye have a light?"

"We haven't anything but matches, and haven't thought a light necessary. Did you have any luck?"

"Nary, we didn't," growled Coleman. "The gal's got away."

"I have one of the Clique for you, all the same."

"Ye hev?" returned the startled captain. "Who?"

"Jack Barbazon."

"Gle-ory! He's the feller that salted away Horace Parmenter's boodle. Waal, now! A leetle luck hes shore come our way arter all."

"He's wounded in the hand," said the scout, "so be careful how you handle him. I'm going to the corral after my horse."

The scout had a slumbering fear that the girl and the cowboys might have led Bear Paw away, or have done something else with the animal. He was quickly reassured regarding this, however, for both Bear Paw and Baldy were still in the corral. Only the haste which the girl and the Circle-T men had been obliged to use in getting away, the scout was positive, had prevented them from taking Bear Paw in tow when they fled.

The scout, after he had cinched up the saddle on Bear Paw, opened the corral gate and shooed the little mustang into the open. Mounting his war horse, he took Baldy at the end of his rope and towed him to the front of the cabin.

"All aboard, Coleman!" cried the scout. "There's quick work ahead for me, and I can't stand for any delay."

"What's the work?" demanded Coleman, appearing shadowily in the open door of the adobe.

"I'll talk with you about it on the way to Montezuma," said the scout.

"Ter Montezuma?" echoed Coleman. "Why ye goin' thar?"

"To try and save Pawnee Bill. Can't you turn Barbazon over to Hank and ride with me? Here's a cayuse

Hank can use for toting Barbazon to Wagon Wheel, but if we ride with them it will delay us. If you think Hank needs help in getting the prisoner to town, why, I'll have to ride alone."

"Nary ye won't ride alone, *compadre*. Wait till I tell Hank."

Coleman turned back into the house, and presently reappeared with the other Ranger, the two bringing Barbazon. The gambler was assisted to the back of the mustang and his feet roped under the pony's scraggly body.

"Ye'll git along in good shape now, Hank," said Coleman, climbing to the back of his horse. "Jest keep movin', son, an keep out o' the way o' anybody ye meet up with in the trail. *Adios!*"

"*Adios*, cap'n," answered Hank. "Don't ye fret none erbout me an' the tinhorn. We'll git ter Wagon Wheel with ground ter spare."

Buffalo Bill and Coleman, without delaying further, flung off along the blind trail that led toward the main road.

"Now," said Coleman, "cough up the rest o' it, *compadre*."

The road to Montezuma was also, for several miles, the direct road to Wagon Wheel Gap. While the scout and the captain galloped onward through the darkness, the former related the substance of what he had learned from Perdita.

"Woudn't that knock ye slabsided?" muttered Coleman, when he had got a firm grip on the facts. "It's high time, I reckon, that this hyer Clique gang o' trouble makers was put whar they kain't do any more o' their bloodthirsty, high-handed plannin'. We've nailed Barbazon. Question is, kin we nail Jorgé Reyes at Montezuma, or aire we too late? An' kin we put a kibosh on Emil Flint at Whipsaw Mounting? I'm afeared we kain't."

"We may be too late to help Pawnee Bill or the baron," said the scout moodily, "but we'll not be too late to settle accounts with Reyes and Flint. Anyhow, Coleman, I'll camp right down in this part of the country until those two scoundrels are keeping company with Barbazon in the Wagon Wheel jail."

"That's you!" exclaimed Coleman, with intense satisfaction. "When ye express yerself in that tone o' voice it's a cinch somethin' is due ter drap. But look at the foolishness o' what this Clique was plannin', an' all on account o' Jeff Trent. Say, I'm use ter border ways, but fer cold-blooded schemin' that Perdita has 'em all beat. I'm a heap sorry she vamoosed."

"She's a woman," returned the scout, "and she won't be able to do much lawless planning with her husband and the rest of the Clique out of the way. If we capture the men, Perdita will be helpless so far as—"

"Hist!" warned Coleman, laying back on his reins. "Who's that ahead?"

The scout peered into the gloom and saw a moving blur of shadow in the trail.

"A lone horseman," muttered the scout.

"Mebby Jorgé, mebby Flint," whispered Coleman.

"I don't think so; Jorgé is at Montezuma, and Flint's at Whipsaw—"

"Onless one or t'other of 'em has finished his work an' is ridin' ter that adobe ter jine the gal," cut in Coleman. "Let's make front on the ombray an' git his credentials."

Again they spurred into a gallop. The other horseman, at that, pulled to a standstill and could be seen to make a motion with one of his hands.

"He's drawin'," called Coleman. "Hands up, you," he yelled, "in the name o' the Rangers an' the law!"

"*Boshu nechee*," came a response in a familiar tone that almost dropped the scout from his saddle. "If you're a Ranger, pard, then we're well met. I'm looking for Pard Cody, and you can help."

"Lookin' fer him?" yelled Coleman. "Take another look, ye ole hardshell, an' ye'll find ye're lookin' at him, right hyer, stirrup ter stirrup with me."

"Is that you, necarnis?" asked Pawnee Bill, his voice reflecting the astonishment that filled him.

"Great guns, Pawnee!" gasped the scout, "where did you come from?"

It was a double surprise for the pards.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON TO WHIPSAW MOUNTAIN.

"I had a notion," said Pawnee Bill, after a few silent moments in which he had adjusted himself to this unexpected stroke of luck, "I had a notion, necarnis, that you had tumbled head over heels into more trouble than you could handle. Now, by my medicine, this is one of the happiest surprises that ever crossed trails with me!"

"I had entertained a similar notion regarding yourself, pard," returned the scout. "By all the logic of events, about now you ought to be sponged from the slate."

"On-she-ma-da!" breathed the prince of the bowie. "Where did you find out what the Clique was up to?"

"And you know about the Clique!" muttered the scout. "What I discovered only came to me by a few hard knocks; but you—"

"My information came by hard knocks, too," laughed Pawnee Bill, "only it was Fritz Von Schnitzenhauser who corralled all the violence, and then passed his news on to me. To come back at you, necarnis, by all the logic of events, as I see them, you were to be sponged from the slate first, and then I was to be attended to, and lastly our Dutch ne-be-nau-baig, the baron."

"There was a change in the plans, Pawnee. After Fritz got away from the Circle-T, Perdita planned to have the members of the Clique separate, and each of them pay attention to one of us. I fell to Perdita and Jack Barbazon, you were Jorgé Reyes' choice, and the baron was Emil Flint's."

"Tell me about this!" murmured the prince of the bowie. "It's enough to make the fur stand on a buffalo robe! All you and I seem to get out of it is about a couple of square miles of fun, mixed with a certain amount of worry; but the baron—I wonder what's happening to him?"

"Let's get at this thing with some sort of system. How did you escape the net laid by the Clique? It was rather a clever scheme, from what I've heard of it. You were to be summoned to Wagon Wheel Gap by a cowboy messenger, the summons presumably coming from me. Among the rocks, along the rim of Bowie Gulch, you were to be laid for by one-eyed Jules and some of the Circle-T outfit. Did you get away from them?"

"That's a time, necarnis," answered Pawnee Bill, "that I unconsciously dodged trouble. You see, I found Slocum in Montezuma, visited with him, and then fared away for Wagon Wheel—getting out of Montezuma before Jorgé had a chance to send his messenger. But I'd have fallen for that play. You see, I thought I might be needed by you and Coleman. That's why I cut short my visit with Slocum."

"Luck, blamed if it ain't!" interpolated Coleman.

Pawnee Bill went on to tell of his discovering the wreck of Fritz Von Schnitzenhauser's wagon in the trail, of finding the Dutchman's mules and, finally, the Dutchman himself. The Dutchman's information, repeated for the benefit of the scout and the Ranger, clinched the proofs of the Clique's murderous plotting.

"I was some stumped when I got to the hotel in Wagon Wheel Gap," finished Pawnee Bill, "and learned that you had ridden out of town with a moharrie. No one said a word to me about Coleman following."

"Fer the reason, Pawnee," chimed in the Ranger, "that no one knowed about it."

"I had supper in Wagon Wheel," the prince of the bowie continued, "and right after that I learned that you and the girl had ridden away along the Whipsaw trail. That was the trail for me, and I was following it, and fretting a little, when we came together. An-pe-tu-we! Some things seem too good to be true, and I guess this is one of them. Now, necarnis, it's your turn."

"Suppose we ride for Whipsaw Mountain while we go into that?" suggested the scout.

"Good idee!" approved Coleman. "We'll never reach Whipsaw, the best we can do, afore sunup."

"Why?" demanded Pawnee Bill. "I was told it wasn't very far—not an all-night's ride, in any event."

"A three hours' ride by day, when ye can see," said Coleman, "but it takes all night if ye got any regard fer yer neck. It's an up-and-down trail when ye hit the mountain. Part o' the way ye're travelin' a shelf two feet wide in places, with nothin' but a hundred feet o' clear air below an' a cliff wall above; an' part o' the way ye're crossin' chasms on causeways o' rock, whar a slip spells yore finish. It's a slow ride, up that blame' mountain by night."

"Then let's be about it, Coleman," urged the scout, pointing Bear Paw the other way. "We may be too late to do anything for the baron, but it's a safe bet we can do something to this Emil Flint."

"Scoot-a-wah-boo!" cried Pawnee Bill. "We'd better do our prettiest while the trail is good."

Their "prettiest" was a gallop that made talking unsatisfactory. They met and passed Hank and Barbazon—flirting by the two with only a reassuring shout.

It was "klat-away"—"klat-away" to the rescue of the baron, hoping against hope that chance would blunder, in some way, just as it had blundered in the case of Pawnee Bill.

When the rough country was reached and the horses slowed down, the talk began. Buffalo Bill straightened out the tangles of the situation, so far as they related to his own experiences.

"Pard Bill," remarked the prince of the bowie, "what you did and the way you did it would have been a beautiful thing to see! I'm hearing so much about this Perdita that I should like to match wits with her myself. That two-gun game she played might have resulted in disaster to you if your own wits hadn't been working overtime. Well done, necarnis!"

"With the tip I had from Coleman, Pawnee," said the scout, "my only play was to fall in with Perdita's scheme and see it through."

"I reckernized her," put in Coleman, "the minit sh~~o~~ showed up in Wagon Wheel an' begun askin' fer you."

"She has a face and a pair of eyes that can't be disguised," answered the scout. "Once seen, they're never forgotten. But she's a fiend."

"Best faro dealer, they say, thet ever turned over a kyard."

"I can imagine that. Cool hand, I take it, no matter what happens."

"Allers cool; an', by the same token, allers plannin' the deviltry fer the rest o' the gang. Ye say ye think, Buffalo Bill, that when the men members o' the Clique aire run in, that this Perdita gal will hev ter throw her hand inter the discard. I got other ideas about that. She'll be after us with a double grievance—one on account o' what happened ter Jeff Trent, and another on account o' what ter happen ter Jorgé."

"What's Jorgé?" queried the prince of the bowie,

"Another cool hand," answered Coleman. "He's greaser, through an' through, but he's able ter hide it when he pasears around the various camps in disguise. All the same, the greaser earmarks afe on him, no matter whether he's purtendin' ter be an honest miner from the New Mexico hills, or an honest puncher from the Panhandle."

"How about Emil Flint?" asked the scout. "I'm rather more concerned about him than about Reyes, just now. It's Flint who's to deal with the baron."

"Thar's something of the Jew in Flint, but ye wouldn't guess it ter look at him or ter hear him talk. He's a star in the gamblin' line, an' the way he kin slip a cut, or stack an innercent deck, or pull four aces out o' the back o' his neck durin' a game is a caution ter cats. From what I know o' yer Dutch pard, *compadres*, I'm fearin' Flint won't hev no trouble runnin' in his rhinecaboos on him. The baron is some trustful with strangers, I jedge."

"Some," agreed Pawnee Bill, "but we must not overlook the fact that the baron is full of blunders, and that his blunders usually carry him in the right direction. If he plans to do the wrong thing, fate lays hold of the proceedings and he stumbles on the right one. I have hopes—even if we can't reach Whipsaw camp till morning and Flint has all night in which to work."

"I have hopes myself," seconded the scout. "The baron's blunders have saved him more than once."

"If we could git up the mountain by the log chute," observed Coleman, "we'd save quite er spell o' breakneck travelin' an' several good hours."

"Log chute?" echoed the scout.

"It's er nacheral slide down the mountain," explained the Ranger, "straight as a die an' seems like it was made special fer the fellers that's cuttin' the timber. A log is tipped inter the slide an'—whoosh! down she goes like a streak o' greased lightnin'. The chute ends in the lake, an' when them logs hit the water, a geyser spouts up fer fifty feet inter the air."

"What are the logs used for, Coleman?"

"Fer shorin' up timbers in the Whipsaw mine. That thar mine is run in treacherous ground, an' the tunnels, an' crosscuts, an' shafts all hev ter be timbered plentiful ter keep 'em from cavin' in. That's what the logs is fer, an' they're pulled acrost the lake an' up the outlet ter the mine an' the mill."

He broke off his remarks abruptly.

"Hyer," he finished, "is whar we begin the climb. Foller me an' foller close. Keerful does it. It ain't many men ye could hire ter climb ole Whipsaw in the dark."

Certainly the great bulk of the mountain, showing darkly against the background of night sky, looked ominous to the horsemen.

But they began their climb, led by the Ranger, who

knew every inch of the trail from long and arduous experience. For that matter, all that part of the country was an open book to Coleman, and he could read it by night as well as by day.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BARON AND THE FRIENDLY COWBOY.

As has already been stated, Villum Von Schnitzenhauer, otherwise the baron, had left Wagon Wheel Gap, and the rather vague premonitions of excitement offered by Captain Coleman, for what he supposed to be the certainty of lively doings in the lumber camp. Never had the baron made a greater mistake.

The only excitement experienced by the baron was during the climb up the mountainside.

There were two trails leading to Whipsaw camp, one on the east side of the mountain and the other on the west. It was a current saying in that part of the country that no matter which trail you took you would wish you had taken the other.

So far as difficulty went, there was little to choose between the two trails.

The baron, as it chanced, selected a different trail from the one chosen by Captain Coleman when he led the pards in the direction of the mountain's crest. But the baron, unlike the Ranger, the scout, and the prince of the bowie, had daylight for his trip.

Half a dozen times, during his upward climb, the baron believed that he was surely in for a breakneck tumble. Only the sure-footedness of Toofer, his mule, stood between him and destruction.

When he finally reached the half dozen log shacks on the brow of the mountain, he found the place as quiet as a country churchyard. There was no hotel, but a house where lodgers were accommodated.

The baron secured a bed, and a seat at the table, and staked Toofer out close to water and with a bundle of baled hay. Then he went to see where the "liveliness" came in.

After an hour's tramp through the timber, watching the monotonous work of tree felling, tree trimming, and log hauling, he made up his mind that he had struck the wrong settlement in his hunt for excitement.

There were no more than a dozen men employed in the camp, and these were all sober, industrious fellows who attended strictly to their work and had no time for hunting trouble, or any other brand of foolishness.

The only thing the baron saw, that even remotely enthused him, was the log chute and the lightninglike disappearance of the big sticks down the groove and into the lake.

For the entire distance of their flight the dogs could be watched, and at the bottom of the mountain, far below, they could be seen driving into the waters of the lake and sending a plume of spray high into the air.

The trail the baron had followed in climbing the mountain lay close to the big slide, and a good deal of the trail was visible as it wound in and out among the huge boulders, along the edge of the precipice and across natural bridges of rock that spanned dizzy chasms.

"I vas a fool for coming to dis blace," grunted the baron, sitting at the head of the slide and watching the logs go down. "All dere iss to see iss some fellers cutting wood, und some more fellers pushing it down der slide, aber dere vasn't so much oxcidement as vat you got in a Kvaker meeding, py shinks. Oof I vasn't afraid oof dot drail, py chimineddy, I could go 'way ad vonce."

The thought of again facing the danger of that climb caused chills to canter up and down the baron's neck. He asked about the other trail, and even inspected the top of it. Finally he reached the decision that, when he finally made up his mind to leave, he'd take the trail he had used in ascending the mountain. He knew something about that, and he didn't know a thing about the other one.

The baron went to bed early that night, fully resolved to go down the mountain and back to Wagon-Wheel the next morning. In the morning, however, he studied the trail from the head of the log slide, and came to the conclusion that he wasn't equal to it. He would wait until the next day.

He loafed and slept and exchanged small talk with the man on duty at the head of the slide. In the afternoon he spent a couple of hours watching a horseman climb the trail by the big chute. It was very pleasant to the baron to observe, from a safe vantage point, a rider tackling the same perils the baron himself had tackled.

When the rider first came into sight, at the foot of the mountain, he looked like a manikin, he was so far away. By degrees horse and rider grew to their normal size. After an hour of watching, the baron discovered that the approaching horseman was a cowboy.

"He don'd vas vone oof der lumpermen, anyvays," thought the baron. "Meppy he vill bring a leedle oxcidement along mit him. Oof he can blay sefen-oop, I guess I can manach to lif undil do-morrow morning."

The cowboy staked out his horse beside the baron's and, quite casually, made the baron's acquaintance. His name was Lon Bingham, and he had just taken a couple of days off and come up the mountain for the sake of change and variety. Yes, he could play cards—poker, stud or draw, monte, seven-up, hearts, or casino. Certainly he would oblige the baron with a game.

They went at it in the shade, smoking their pipes and apparently enjoying themselves.

Lon Bingham was very friendly. He won all the baron's money inside of an hour—eight dollars—but he did it with so much good-humored badinage that the baron was sorry he hadn't eight dollars more to lose.

"Say, pard," said the cowboy, leaning over and laying an affectionate hand on the baron's shoulder, "it ain't often I take ter a feller, but I'm takin' ter you like a house afire."

"Dot's der vay I hook oop mit you, Lon," gurgled the baron. "Ve vas bards all der time, hey?"

"All the time. Say, I got a good thing I'll let you in on, if you want."

"I like all der goot t'ings vat I can ged," said the baron.

"I didn't come hyer like I said when I first met ye, jest fer change an' variety," explained the cowboy, "but ter find a feller named Jim Sampson."

"Dit you find der feller?"

"Nary, I didn't. He got killed by a fallin' tree last month."

"Vat a luck!"

"It's better luck than ye'd think, baron. Say, that feller was a pardner with me in a minin' claim that beats the Whipsaw ledge hands down. I've picked up float rock on that there claim that assays a thousand dollars ter the ton!"

"Dot's a ponanza!" exclaimed the baron enthusiastically.

"You bet!" declared the cowboy. "Say, I'm goin' ter let ye in on that there claim, free gratis fer nothin'. Ye kin have Jim Sampson's intrust. How does that hit yer corporosity?"

"You peen der pest feller vat I know," said the baron gratefully. "I like you more as I can tell. Shake!"

They shook hands.

"We got ter go ter that claim right off, baron, and make sure it's on the map," went on Lon Bingham.

"We go in der morning, huh?"

"No, to-night."

The baron looked down the crooked trail, with its lumps and abrasions, drew a long breath and shook his head.

"Gif my haluf oof der claim to some odder feller, Lon," said he. "I vouldn't go down dot drail in der nightt for all der goldt in der world."

"Aire yeafeed o' the trail?"

"Vorse as dot, Lon. I peen shcared out oof my life aboudt it."

"I'll take ye down with me, baron. Ye won't make no slip, ner go wrong, if ye travel with me."

"Nein, I don'd go. I vas mooch obliged, aber I don'd take some shances mit der drail in der nightt."

Lon Bingham seemed disappointed.

"Will ye agree ter go airly in the mornin', baron?" he asked.

"Oof it ain'd so early dot ve can't see nodding, den I go."

"Kerect! We'll start in the mornin'. Now let's take a pasear around an' see if we kain't start a dog fight, or some other kind of excitement. This hyer quiet's shore gittin' on my nerves."

There was nothing in the nature of excitement to be found. Later in the evening, when the wood cutters knocked off work, Lon Bingham managed to get into a game of "draw." He staked the baron by lending him some of the eight dollars which had originally belonged to him, and the game began.

It ended by one of the lumbermen calling Lon Bingham a thief and declared that he had seen the cowboy slip three aces out of his sleeve.

Bingham drew a revolver. The lumberman picked up an axe. The baron threw himself on Bingham, and another lumberman grabbed the axe.

"Dere vas some mistake," said the baron, in an endeavor to make peace.

"Look through the rest o' the deck," cried the lumberman, "an' see if ye kain't find four more aces."

The deck was examined, but only one ace was found. The lumberman begged Lon Bingham's pardon, and the game closed with everybody in a happy and forgiving mood.

But all that night the baron was puzzled. At the time the lumberman had called Bingham a thief, the baron himself was holding three aces. In the interests of peace he had slipped those three aces into his pocket. The fact remained, though, that Bingham had really developed three aces of his own; for those, with the baron's three, made six aces—two too many for any honest pack.

This should have opened the baron's eyes as to the character of the cowboy, but the baron had centred his desires on Jim Sampson's interest in Bingham's gold mine, and he was not disposed to pick flaws in Bingham's character.

It was just dawn when Bingham routed the baron out and they went for their mounts. Half an hour later they were slipping down the mountainside.

CHAPTER XV.

PAWNEE BILL'S HAIR-RAISING FEAT.

The sun was striking the top of Whipsaw Mountain with its first beams when Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill and Captain Coleman rode in among the cabins of the lumber camp. Their first move was to put out their horses. If the baron wasn't in the camp it was their opinion they were too late to do anything for him, so it was advisable to put out their horses and give them a rest after their hard night's work.

"I know some fellers up hyer," said Coleman, "an' while I'm huntin' up one of 'em, an' askin' fer information, you fellers kin nose around on yer own hook. We won't be long in findin' how the land lays."

They separated, the scout and the prince of the bowie walking toward the log slide. A red-shirted lumberman was busy there with cant hook and pike pole, pulling logs from a pile and rolling them onto a wooden platform. This platform was at the very top of the slide.

The log, destined for the lake below, was rolled onto the platform with a little less than half its length overhanging the chute. In order to start the log on its descent, it was tipped up at the platform end and dropped over. Then, with a hiss and roar, it shot downward, covering the full length of the slide in a very few seconds.

The pards saw two logs tipped endwise into the stone trough and sent on their way. Another, with a pike pole jabbed into it midway of its length, lay on the platform ready to be started. The red-shirted lumberman turned leisurely to look at the pards.

"Can you tell me, *amigo*," inquired the scout, "if there has been a Dutchman by the name of Von Schnitzenhauer in this camp recently, or if he is here now?"

"Dunno nothin' erbout his name," answered the man, "but thar was a Dutchman hyar fer a couple o' nights who called hisself the baron."

"He's the man!" exclaimed Pawnee Bill.

"Where is he now?" asked the scout.

"He started down the mounting with a cowboy, right airly this mornin'."

"Too late!" muttered the scout.

"Tough luck, necarnis," said Pawnee Bill. "When did they leave, friend?" he asked of the lumberman.

"A leetle over an hour ago," was the answer.

"They didn't go the other trail," remarked the scout.

"Nary, they didn't," said the lumberman. "They went the trail by the slide."

He stepped to the edge of the platform and looked down.

"Thar they aire!" he exclaimed, pointing. "If ye look ye kin see 'em. They're still half an hour from the foot o' the mounting."

The pards ranged themselves at the lumberman's side and followed his pointing finger with their eyes. What they saw were two moving dots, weaving back and forth among the boulders, now lost behind a clump of pines, and now appearing again.

"On-she-ma-da!" cried Pawnee Bill. "And to think we can see them, but can't overhaul them or get word to the baron. How's this for a go?"

It was a queer situation, and no mistake. Somewhere around the shore of the lake a lot of murderous men

were lying in wait for the baron; and there, at the top of the slide, the two pards could watch their unfortunate comrade riding into the trap, utterly unable to prevent the trap's closing!

"We ought to be able to do something," muttered the scout. "This slide follows the trail. If we tied a white rag to the top of that pike pole and pinned a note to it, don't you suppose the baron would suspect something and, somehow, manage to get to the log?"

"The baron wouldn't suspect a thing, Pard Bill," declared Pawnee Bill. "He might think the white rag was something the lumbermen made use of in their work. Even if he did suspect, and tried to get at the log, Flint would interfere."

The pards, for a moment, studied the extensive view below them with melancholy interest.

"The trail," went on the prince of the bowie, "bends away from the bottom of the chute. The baron and the gambler will have to pass that part of the trail before they can reach the point where the gang are lying in wait for our pard."

"That's the size of it," said the scout.

"We were lame, necarnis, in not having one of us stay at the foot of the mountain and——"

"We couldn't guess what was going to happen up here, Pawnee," cut in the scout. "We've done what we could. All that's left for us, now, is to get on our horses and make as quick a ride to the bottom of the mountain as we can."

"What ye fellers worryin' about?" asked the lumberman, picking up an axe and beginning to trim the snag of a limb from the log on the platform.

"That Dutchman is a pard of ours," explained the scout, "and the cowboy is leading him into trouble."

"Why don't ye trail arter him, then, an' tell him what's up?"

"The trouble is to happen close to the foot of the trail. We couldn't get down there in time."

"No more ye couldn't. I reckon yore pard's in fer it, neighbor."

"I've got an idea!" cried Pawnee Bill.

The lumberman, hanging to the axe, turned reflective eyes on the prince of the bowie.

"What's yore idee?"

"Why, I'll ride that log down to the lake!" shouted the prince of the bowie. "I'll hang to the pike pole, and about all I'll get is a ducking."

"No, ye won't!" snorted the lumberman. "No sich crazy doin's'll be pulled off while I'm bossin' the head o' this chute."

"Didn't any one ever do the trick?" asked Pawnee Bill.

"One feller done it, an' come out o' the lake with a busted arm an' leg. He like ter got drownded. Since then I got orders not ter let any loafers hang around the head o' the chute while logs are bein' sent down. You

fellers better clear out o' hyer. I don't like the way ye talk."

"Don't be rough," said the scout. "My pard is only talking. Why, I wouldn't allow him to do such a foolish thing as that. All we want to do is to stay here and watch what goes on below for a few minutes."

"I don't want ye hyer!" snarled the lumberman. "The thing fer you fellers ter do is ter hit the trail down the mounting, an' not stand gawpin' at the head o' the chute. Cl'ar out! I got my orders an' I won't let ye stay. Aire ye goin'?"

Axe in hand, the burly lumberman advanced upon the scout.

"Be reasonable," said the scout, stepping forward and confronting the man. "Put down that axe, do you hear? We'll only stay a few minutes."

The lumberman, probably, would never have used the axe on the scout, but he made a threatening gesture and the scout laid hold of him. He was a huge fellow, with muscles like an ox, and he made a tolerable handful for Buffalo Bill.

Pawnee Bill, meantime, had not been idle. He had seen how the logs were started down the chute, and he was fully determined to run a risk in order to help the baron. The moment was propitious. The scout and the lumberman were engaged in a tussle, and there was no one to interfere with the plans of the prince of the bowie.

Quickly but quietly, Pawnee Bill passed to the edge of the platform. By throwing himself flat down on the log and gripping the pike pole, enough of his weight would be over the chute to cant the log into it. He threw aside his hat coolly, cast a look at his pard and the lumberman, then dropped downward.

Over went the log with a resounding thump. A howl of fear and rage burst from the lumberman.

"Ther blame' ijut is goin' down ther slide!" roared the lumberman. "He'll kill hisself, an' I'll lose my job! I told ye I had my orders!"

The log, with Pawnee Bill aboard, got away like a lightning express, but Buffalo Bill was too busy to give much attention to the hair-raising spectacle.

The lumberman, releasing himself from the scout's grip, jumped away and threw down the axe; then they both watched the slide. Coleman, seeing the scout tussling with the lumberman, had hurried to the scene. He bounded upon the platform and joined the other two in their fearsome survey of what was going on below.

"What's Pawnee doin' that fer?" cried the Ranger.

The scout was too much absorbed in Pawnee Bill's wild ride to answer Coleman or pay attention to any one or anything else.

Every foot of the slide could be seen from the platform. In the centre of it, receding at tremendous speed and coming nearer and nearer to the waters of the lake,

was the log with the dark figure of the prince of the bowie sprawled out on it and clinging to the pike pole.

"Pawnee's a goner!" declared Coleman. "Thar! Look at him hittin' the lake! He'll be drowned, sure as ye're a foot high. Of all the pesky foolishness I ever heerd of this takes the banner."

Without waiting longer, Buffalo Bill turned away. His face was gray with anxiety, but there was a glow of admiration in his eyes.

"Pard Pawnee did that to save the baron, Coleman," said the scout, stooping to pick up Pawnee Bill's hat. "There was nothing else that could help him, and Pawnee didn't hesitate a minute. That's his style—and it's a style that has always appealed to me. Win or lose, that pard of mine has done one of the nerviest things I ever saw—and I've seen a few. Let's ride after him, Coleman. We'll take the trail, ride as fast as we can, and hope for the best when we get to the foot of the mountain."

They hurried to get their horses ready. Chick-Chick, the prince of the bowie's buckskin, was also put under saddle and taken in tow.

"Ye're right," muttered Coleman, as they spurred away for the treacherous trail, "Pawnee Bill has done somethin' this day that'll live in hist'ry. It's a great thing, doin' that fer a pard, but it would hev been a star piece of tomfoolery if he'd done it jest ter see what he could do. I'm hopin' more'n I kin tell that he makes good."

CHAPTER XVI.

PAWNEE BILL MAKES GOOD.

Pawnee Bill's remembrance of that scoot down the side of Whipsaw Mountain was rather hazy. He kept flat on the log, face down, and hung like grim death to the pike pole. The wind whistled in his ears, and he had a feeling as though he was flying through space on a log that never, for one moment, came in contact with the solid earth.

His remembrance of Whipsaw Lake was more tangible. The ride down the chute was nothing, but it was the lake that almost finished the prince of the bowie.

The log struck the water with a smashing sound as of a thousand Niagaras, all rolled into one. Down the log went, on its way to the bottom of the lake, and the water churned in Pawnee Bill's ears and his breath seemed lost for all time.

It seemed to him that he was longer, plunging toward the bottom of the lake, than he had been in racing down the mountain. When the log had finally lost its terrific momentum, it up ended and rushed for the surface as quickly as it had dropped to the lake's bed.

The prince of the bowie was half dazed. All he realized was that he must cling to the pike pole—that if he released hold of that he would slip from the rounded side of the log and be drowned. In his present condition he knew that he would not be able to swim a stroke.

What seemed to Pawnee Bill like a very long time passed as he lay on the log. It was not so long as it seemed, however. In due course his senses returned to him and he lifted himself to a sitting posture on the log. Instantly the log did something which, so far, it had been considerate enough not to do—it began to roll. The prince of the bowie was put to it to keep himself right side up. He managed this, after a fashion, and then began paddling and working his way toward the shore. This was a slow and tedious process, but perseverance won and he slid from the log and waded out on dry land.

He was as wet as a drowned rat. Both revolvers were gone from his belt—a loss he deeply deplored—but he rejoiced to learn that his beloved bowie had clung obstinately to its scabbard.

He walked into the trail and then a little way up the slope, splashing the water from his clothes with every step. Behind a clump of brush, past which the baron and the treacherous Flint must come, Pawnee Bill seated himself. While he watched for his pard and Flint, he removed his boots and emptied the water out of them.

"I guess I've pulled off the first and hardest part of this deal in pretty fair shape," he muttered. "Wonder what my necarnis is thinking about it? On-she-ma-da! Talk about swift going! It's dollars to chalk marks I'll never cover ground again as quick as I did it on that slide. Ah," he broke off, "here they come."

The baron, chattering in friendly-wise with the man who was leading him into an ambush, rode Toofer gayly, well pleased to be over the hard part of that up-and-down trail. As the pair came close, Pawnee Bill crouched in the thicket. When Emil Flint was directly opposite him, the prince of the bowie leaped at the man and dragged him from the back of the horse.

Astonishment held Flint in its grip. This was an advantage to Pawnee Bill. The baron, failing to recognize his pard in the bedraggled man who had set upon Flint, dropped from Toofer's back and went to Flint's aid. Hardly had he mixed in the set-to, however, before he got a good look at Pawnee Bill's face, and recognized him.

"Py chiminy grickeds!" gasped the baron, starting back. "Oof it ain'd Pawnee Bill! Vere—vere—"

Words failed the baron. Rooted to the ground with amazement, he could only stand and stare.

"A rope, baron!" cried Pawnee Bill. "Quick, pard!"

"Dot feller iss a friendt oof mine, Pawnee," expostulated the baron.

"He was leading you into a trap," flung back the prince of the bowie. "Get a rope, I tell you!"

The baron, badly demoralized by what he heard and saw, took a rope from Flint's saddle and helped Pawnee Bill tie the prisoner's hands. At this particular moment, another Dutchman, riding one mule and leading another, came upon the scene from below. This last traveler was headed up the mountain. The baron looked at him, and they both stared.

"Fritz!" whooped the baron.

"Der paron, iss it?" answered Fritz. "Here vas luck, some more. It iss pedder to be born lucky as to lif in some glass houses, and I vas sure a lucky Dutchman. Be careful oof yourseluf, paron! Dere iss drouple on der pike for you. Some fellers is blanning to lead you avay und—"

Just then Pawnee Bill rose up, Fritz got a look at him and there was another surprise for the newcomer.

"Dit you ged here aheadt oof me afder all, eh?" queried Fritz.

"I did," answered Pawnee Bill, "about five minutes ahead of you, Fritz. You're a little late in getting to Whipsaw Mountain, seems to me."

"Pedder lade as nefer," answered Fritz. "Der mools made me some drouples und I don't vas aple to come kevicker. Who iss dot feller mit der ropes on?"

"One of the gamblers," answered Pawnee Bill. "Lend me one of your guns, baron," he added. "I'm going to see what's become of the rascals who were lying in wait for you."

The baron, still bewildered by the rapid progress of events, yielded up one of his revolvers and Pawnee Bill started down the trail. He had not gone far before, from his elevated post of observation, he saw four horsemen racing along the trail that followed the edge of the lake. They looked back as they raced, and he recognized one or two of them as cowboys belonging with the Circle-T outfit.

"They were there, all right," he muttered. "The baron would have been either wiped out, or captured, if I hadn't taken that ride down the log chute. It was worth it."

Slowly he returned to the prisoner and the two Von Schnitzenhausers; then, when all had seated themselves comfortably, Pawnee Bill began to tell the baron of the danger he had been in and of the narrow escape he had had.

The baron was thunderstruck.

"Vat drouples ve tangle oop mit ven ve don't know nodding aboudt it," he muttered. "Pawnee Bill, you haf safed my life, I bed you! Vat a sgoundrel dot Flint feller iss! He vas schlick aboudt it, und he say dot he gif me haluf a goldt mine oof I come mit him. Aber it vas a lead mine dot he vas going to handt me, dere py der lake. *Himmelblitzen*, vat a close call id vas!"

"I dit vat I could meinselfuf," chimed in Fritz, "und I proke oop der wagon, I work so hardt. Aber it vas all for

der Von Schnitzenhausers. Der Von Schnitzenhausers haf got to shtick togedder, eh?"

From up the trail came a clatter of hoofs. Every one started erect and listened. The baron drew a revolver.

"Oof dot iss more oof der gamblers," he muttered, "I vill do a leedle fighdting, I bed you."

But it wasn't any of the gamblers. Buffalo Bill and Coleman, full of apprehension for both the baron and the prince of the bowie, were racing down the trail. Never before had that treacherous course been covered at such a pace as the scout and the Ranger had set that morning.

"Pawnee!" cried the joyful king of scouts, flinging himself from Bear Paw and rushing forward to grasp his pard's hand. "That was the finest thing I ever saw, pard, and it won!"

"This performance o' yourn, Pawnee," put in Coleman, pressing close to tender his own congratulations, "will be the talk o' the hull kentry. I wisht ye'd jine the Rangers."

Congratulations were passed around, followed by more talk to get all phases of the situation straightened out.

"Waal," said Coleman, "we got two o' them gamblers—an' two's better'n none at all. But I'd like er heap ter bag the rest o' ther gang."

"That can come later, Coleman," returned the scout. "My pards and I have slipped through the coil Perdita and the tinhorns laid for us, and I think we have every reason to congratulate ourselves. Suppose we drop in at the Whipsaw mining camp and get our breakfast before going back to Wagon Wheel Gap?"

"Dot's a goot itee," approved the baron.

"I vas villing," said Fritz. "Und I vill go by Vagon Veel Gap, too. I don'd like to go home mitoudt a vagon."

Emil Flint, sullen and uncommunicative, was bound to his horse, and the reunited pards, with the Ranger, laid their course in the direction of the mining camp.

"We'll hear from Perdita and Jorgé before we are many hours older," declared Pawnee Bill.

"I hope so, *amigo*," answered Captain Coleman, "but I'm not makin' any bets. If them two know when they're well off, they'll get out o' the kentry—an' kick up mighty little disturbance when they go."

THE END.

"A friend in need is a perd in de handt alretty," says comical Fritz, of Buffalo Bill, in the next story. He and the baron are sadly in need of somebody's help. They walked right into a trap set for them by a crafty girl. Buffalo Bill plays the game with her, leaving no score unsettled. Pawnee does some ace-high bowie work as a trump card, and there are some exciting show-downs before the finish. The title of this bully yarn is "Buffalo Bill and Perdita Reyes; or, Pawnee Bill's Bowie Practice." Out next week in No. 488. Be sure to read it.



NEW YORK, September 10, 1910.

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A BOY WHO WOULDN'T FIGHT.

During the war of the Rebellion a boy named Tillman Vestal, about eighteen years old, a Quaker by birth and practice, who resided in Maury County, Tennessee, experienced a remarkably checkered career. He was first taken from his quiet home near Columbia by conscript officers, who carried him to Bragg's army, then in camp at Shelbyville, Tennessee. Here he was assigned to duty in the Fourth Tennessee Regiment, commanded by Colonel McMurry, as gallant a soldier as ever drew a blade in the lost cause, and who afterward fell mortally wounded at the head of his regiment on the bloody field of Chickamauga. Vestal was ordered to duty, but in a calm, firm tone he informed the officers of the regiment that the war was in direct opposition to the principles of his religion, and he could not conscientiously, and would not in any way perform military duty. He was talked to kindly by the colonel, who said that if he did not obey orders he would be punished. His reply was to the effect that they might punish him, but no man living could force him to do violence to his convictions of duty, or to the principles of his religion. Threats, entreaties, and persuasions were all unavailing to move him from his purpose, and at last he was discharged from custody and ordered to go. In a few weeks after his return home one of the many conscript officers who, in those days, rode through the country, living upon the fat of the land and feathering their nests whenever the opportunity offered, came upon Vestal, and he again fell a victim to conscription. Vestal, having asked for two weeks' time within which to report, was granted his request, after having given satisfactory assurance that he would report to Bragg's headquarters at the end of that time. In the intervening time Bragg fell back with his army to Chattanooga. Young Vestal, however, faithful to his promise, walked all the way from Columbia to Chattanooga, and reported in person to the commanding general. He was again assigned to duty with the Fourth Tennessee, Colonel McMurry, who at once recognized him as the same youth he had met at Shelbyville, and remarked to him that he hoped he had returned to the army to do his duty as a soldier. Vestal replied that he still adhered to his determination to do no military service. Colonel McMurry thereupon entered into a Scriptural argument to convince the young Quaker that his position was all wrong. Vestal proved to be equal to the occasion, and turned the colonel down so frequently that he sent for the chaplain to convince him of the errors of his way. The ar-

gument between the chaplain and Vestal was short, but to the point. The chaplain said: "My young friend, I would not give a cent for a religion which is opposed to my country." Vestal replied: "And I, sir, would not give a cent for a country that is opposed to my religion."

Here the argument closed with Vestal in possession of the field. The colonel threatened to court-martial Vestal, perhaps put him on bread-and-water diet, and by every means in his power endeavored to induce him to perform duty, but all his efforts were in vain. He refused even to police camp, bring a bucket of water, or do any of the little chores incumbent upon soldiers, or anything, in fact, that could be construed into military service. Some friend suggested to him that he might go into the hospital as a nurse. He replied that he would consider it his bounden duty to attend to the wants of the sick of either army, if the occasion should offer, but going into the hospital as a nurse would be as much in the line of military duty as carrying a musket on the field, and for this reason he declined to do it. It reached the ears of his commanding officer that he had served an apprenticeship making earthenware. It was then suggested to Vestal that there was a pottery down in Georgia, and he was asked if he would accept a place in that.

He replied that if it was a private enterprise he would accept a position in it, but if it was a government affair and was run in the interest of the war he would not. The colonel failed at every point in his efforts to bring the non-combatant to terms, and sent him to brigade headquarters, where he was assured that if he persisted in his determination and refused to obey the orders of his officers, he would be shot. Vestal answered by saying: "You have me in your power and can take my life, but love of life, nor fear of death, can make me false to my principles." Possessed of the material which martyrs are made of, he had determined to die rather than be false to his religion. That he would have gone to the stake cheerfully rather than have performed military duty all were persuaded who witnessed his determined spirit and tone. This calm, quiet determination which nothing could move or shake had nothing in it, however, of the braggart or bully.

A law had been passed by the Confederate Congress allowing Quakers, on the payment of five hundred dollars, exemption from military service. Some person who respected the young Quaker's religious scruples, and who was satisfied that he acted from a conscientious sense of duty, asked him if he could not pay the five hundred dollars, and thus end the difficulties under which he was laboring, pointing out to him at the same time the rugged road he would have to travel, if he persisted in his course, and seriously informing him that it would at last result in his being shot for disobedience of orders. Vestal said he could raise the five hundred dollars easily enough, but that of itself would not remove his difficulties, for, said he: "With the five hundred dollars I pay into their hands they could hire another man to fight, and I had as well do it myself as to furnish the means for a substitute." Vestal's case was finally reported to General Polk, who entered into correspondence with the War Department at Richmond about it. In the meantime Vestal was transferred to Knoxville, and at last found his way into the Fourteenth Regiment, then in Virginia. The brigade commander, knowing nothing of the previous history of the case, when Vestal refused to do military duty, ordered him to be put to the bayonet. The soldiers performed their duties well, sticking their bayonets into him time and again, but Vestal never flinched nor showed the least trepidation, but refused from first to last to do any military duty, however insignificant or unimportant. He was placed under arrest, and frequently while on the march or on the retreat, he would become separated from the guard, but in every case he would come up promptly and report after the army had gone into camp. On several occasions he was advised by parties who wished to put him

to the test to run away and return to his home and thus get rid of the trials, vexations, and punishments to which he was subjected. His reply was always: "No, I will not do it. They had me up at Shelbyville and Chattanooga, and have trotted me all over the country on the same charge for which I am now in arrest, and I am determined to have the matter settled one way or the other." For a long time Vestal was a prisoner at Castle Thunder, in Richmond. After the war closed he went North, completed his education, and taught school. He landed at his father's house, in Maury County, Tennessee, just seven years from the time he had left to report to General Bragg at Chattanooga.

THE CORPORAL'S ADVERSARY.

Among the ambitious soldiers longing to distinguish themselves and win an honorable name, during the war for the Union, was Walter Clyde, an intelligent young man belonging to the —th regiment regulars.

Unfortunately, promotion is slow in the regular army.

Walter had for ten years served in his regiment, to at last merely win the position of corporal.

He was a favorite both with men and officers, the latter frequently speaking in high terms of the fidelity and courage he had shown during occasional combats with the Indians.

He was never heard to grumble, but went steadily on, performing his monotonous duties with a cheerful promptitude which had a good effect upon all associated with him.

A mere glance at the man would have been sufficient for one to ascertain his character.

Of fresh, ruddy complexion, his clear blue eyes sparkled with the light of health, while his firm, trumpet-like voice fell like music upon the ear.

Drenched through and through with rain, loaded with heavy equipments, marching through muddy roads and marshes, the gallant corporal was ever the same cheerful fellow, infusing life and animation through the shivering frames of his comrades.

After the breaking out of the war his regiment was sent to Virginia, where it encamped within five miles of Fortress Monroe.

Pickets and scouting parties were frequently sent out, the corporal often having command of a squad, which seldom came back without bringing a trophy of victory over some portion of the enemy's troops.

Still, the corporal was not promoted, although the officers continued to bear testimony to his good conduct.

Walter was not in the least discouraged by such tardiness, but, like a true soldier, took it in good part—joking and laughing about it whenever his comrades were inclined to complain for him.

Months passed.

One day the colonel sent for Corporal Clyde.

The young soldier felt hopeful. Only a few days before, with a small party of men, he had attacked and carried a Confederate breastwork. Now, surely the colonel was going to reward him; he was to be promoted.

With this thought uppermost, he repaired to the colonel's quarters, and, saluting his commander, waited for the welcome words.

"Corporal Clyde," said the commander, "I am going to trust you with a very important matter."

"Yes, sir."

"Because of all the men in the regiment, I have the most faith in you."

"Thank you, sir."

"You are to take this packet"—putting a sealed roll of paper in his hand—"to General Warren, commanding Fort —, which is twenty miles from here, and to gain which you will have to pass through a country infested with strolling parties of Confederate infantry and cavalry."

"Yes, sir."

"In case you should be attacked and cut to pieces," added

the colonel, with as much calmness as if he were speaking of a roasted turkey, "this paper must not fall into the hands of the enemy."

"It shall not, sir," replied Clyde, equally as calm.

"It is so arranged that it can in a moment be blown to pieces by the application of a match to the twisted piece of paper which you see protruding from it. There is a charge of gunpowder in the roll."

"Yes, sir," answered Clyde, smiling; "but in case I should suddenly be shot dead, I would not have time to light it."

"You would probably have time to govern the direction of your fall. Even when a man is shot through the brain he retains sense for a few seconds. In case you are shot, be sure to fall flat upon your breast and face. You will carry the roll in your breast pocket, and in falling upon it the pressure will strike a concealed cap in it, causing an explosion, and thus destroy the packet."

"I will follow your directions."

"Do so; and in case you ever come back, I shall be glad to hear your report. If, on the contrary, you should be killed, I shall know that the packet did not fall into the enemy's hands. Now go—start as soon as you can."

The young man left the tent in as cheerful a mood as ever.

Although the colonel had said nothing to him of promotion, yet it afforded him intense satisfaction to know that his commander had such confidence in his fidelity and courage.

He was soon equipped and on his way, with a chart of the country through which he was to pass in his pocket.

His first day's journey was performed with no particular adventure.

On the second day, as he approached a rugged cliff, obstructing his passage, and which he would be obliged to cross, several Confederates appeared on the brow of the ridge.

They lifted their rifles and took aim at him, showering ere they fired all manner of epithets upon him.

Before they stopped talking the corporal sent a bullet through the brain of one of them, who, with a wild shriek, fell forward over the cliff.

"Aye, aye," thought Walter, "the colonel was right. A man retains sense after being shot through the brain."

Boong! whiz-z-z! whiz-z! came a couple of bullets from the dead man's comrades while the speaker was reloading.

The missiles passed within an inch or two of his head, as if warning him that he might have personal proof of his assertion.

To stand all day firing at the two Confederates was not to the corporal's taste; so he moved on up the ridge, dodging from rock to rock, loading, firing, and receiving his enemies' fire in return.

At last he was fortunate enough to hit another of his foes, who fell, badly wounded.

The other, lifting his wounded comrade, who was a light youth, in his arms, hurried off, shouting out that he would yet have satisfaction.

Clyde hurried on, and, mounting the ridge, looked in vain for more enemies. The country beneath him was thickly wooded, however, so that a foe might find an excellent ambush.

He descended and marched on, holding his rifle in readiness to be discharged at a moment's warning.

He met with no other enemy that morning.

In the afternoon he beheld, far away, the ramparts of the fort, which was his destination. The sight of the Stars and Stripes fluttering from a tall pine staff cheered his heart.

On he went with a light step.

There is, however, "many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip." As he approached a thick copsewood, he saw a man, with a carbine over his shoulder, emerge from among the trees.

The man came toward him. As he drew nearer, Walter detected the unmistakable gray, Confederate uniform.

"Hello!" shouted the foe, when Clyde was within a hundred yards of him; "jist stand thar whar you be, and see if I can't hit you."

So saying, he lifted the carbine and sent a bullet whizzing on its way.

"You are my prisoner!" exclaimed the corporal, rushing toward the Confederate, who would not have time to reload ere the other would be upon him.

"Not so sure of that!" exclaimed the foe, drawing an ugly-looking broadsword from his belt and dodging behind a tree.

The corporal kept on his way.

"Come!" he exclaimed, pointing his rifle; come from behind that tree, or you are a dead man!"

The Confederate, however, kept dodging behind the tree, thus eluding Clyde's rifle.

Impatient of the delay, the corporal threw down the rifle, and, drawing a revolver with which he was provided, rushed up and seized the foe by the collar of his shirt, pointing the pistol at his head.

The man made a sweep at his antagonist with his broadsword, which, however, catching against the tree, failed to strike his adversary.

The corporal, determined to carry the man alive to the fort, rapped him on the head with his pistol, nearly stunning him.

The Confederate staggered, when, replacing his revolver, the corporal hurled him to the earth, and, putting a knee upon his breast, disarmed him of the broadsword.

Still, however, the foe struggled.

"Resistance is useless," exclaimed Clyde; "you may as well surrender."

"Surrender! I was never so far from surrendering in my life!" answered the prostrate man.

As he spoke, he succeeded, by a vigorous push with his knees, in throwing the corporal backward, by a quick movement possessing himself, at the same time, of his revolver.

"Now, then, it is your turn to surrender," he shouted exultingly, pointing the weapon at the corporal's head.

"Not so fast," responded Clyde, quick as lightning knocking the revolver from the other's grasp.

The weapon was discharged, the bullet passing between both men.

They threw themselves upon each other, and a desperate struggle ensued.

The Confederate was tall and powerful, as active as he was strong; in fact, the two men were well matched, the corporal, while not so tall, being broad-shouldered and firmly built.

Over and over upon the ground rolled the combatants.

It was a sort of wild-cat rough-and-tumble.

Finally the Confederate succeeded in grasping his broadsword, lying on the ground.

He made a furious blow at the corporal, who, however, easily dodged the weapon.

Clyde's temper was by this time aroused, and as the foe would not surrender, he deemed it high time to put an end to the struggle, if possible.

Jumping back, he possessed himself of the revolver, only one barrel of which, as mentioned, had been discharged.

Rushing upon his antagonist, he avoided another blow from the broadsword; then, by a quick movement, wrested the weapon from the man's hand. He performed these manœuvres easily, owing to the foe having slightly sprained his wrist during the struggle upon the ground.

The corporal had, during that struggle, been obliged to exert the greatest care to keep from pressing too hard upon the valuable packet in his bosom, lest it should be destroyed by exploding.

It was, in fact, his fears for the packet which made him so anxious to put an end to the combat.

Having disarmed the foe of his broadsword, he now pressed him back against the tree, with his left hand grasping his throat, while, with the other, he pressed the muzzle of the revolver against his forehead.

"Your time has come!" he exclaimed. "I shall spare you no longer."

The trigger clicked, and the next moment the weapon must have been discharged.

"Hold!" exclaimed his antagonist. "I am a Union spy—not a Confederate."

The corporal, not sure this was not a ruse, would not let his prisoner go.

"Do you still doubt? Listen!"

Suddenly pulling a whistle from his breast pocket, he sounded it, to be answered by a sudden shout in the distance, followed by the galloping of hoofs.

Clyde then beheld a squad of Union cavalry approaching.

Still, however, he retained his grasp of the man's collar.

Finally the horsemen drew up near the tree, the captain dismounting and rushing toward Clyde with drawn revolver.

"Halt, captain, it's all right!" shouted Clyde's late antagonist. "I honor this young man for his noble conduct. I am General Warren!" he added, addressing the astonished corporal.

No longer doubting, the latter released the prisoner, and was proceeding to apologize, when the general checked him.

"Nay, never apologize for doing your duty. I carried out the deception to make sure you were of the right stuff. That you are," he added, laughing, and moving his head. "I am glad to say I have had sufficient proof. Moreover, General Warren is not ashamed of his defeat by so gallant a corporal."

The corporal was conducted to the fort. On his arrival there he learned that the general was in the habit of disguising himself and going out as a spy.

He delivered the packet, after reading which the general informed him that besides the private matters therein contained, there was a recommendation for his—the corporal's—promotion to a second lieutenantcy, which he—the general—was solicited to sign.

"I do not exactly approve it," added the speaker.

"Very well, sir," answered the corporal, with his usual resignation.

"You deserve better," continued the other; "you shall be made first lieutenant for thrashing your general."

"Thank you, sir," cried the young man, his whole frame trembling with the excitement caused by his good fortune.

* * * * *

Clyde received his commission. He served with great credit in the war, and was finally promoted a major. He is now out West, in command of an important post, which is gladdened by the presence of his wife, a beautiful lady—the daughter of the gallant general who promoted him.

CAUGHT FOR ONCE.

Years ago a young woman told Barnum, the famous showman, that she had a cherry-colored cat. He told her to bring it and he would give her a hundred dollars for it.

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"Where's the cherry cat?" said he.

"Why, that's the one," said the woman; "a black cherry cat."

Barnum, fairly caught, handed her the hundred dollars, told her to leave, and gave orders that she was never to be admitted again.

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